

## Mark 9:30-50

### “What It Takes To Be Great”

To catch the context Jesus has just delivered a demon possessed boy and encouraged the faith of his father, however the disciples (9 of them at least) were left lingering around disappointed. Why? Because originally the man had come to *them* but they were unable to help *him*. Their problem (Jesus pointed out) was one of prayerlessness, they hadn't been maintaining that close communion with God through prayer. Therefore when called upon regarding a spiritual need they were seeking to meet the need in the efforts of their flesh, and it'll never happen. You can not minister in the name of the Lord in the efforts of the flesh. It has to be done in the power of the Spirit; walking with the Lord, staying close *to* the Lord, continually cultivating that relationship with the Lord through prayer and the study of His word. If not your only recourse is to seek to deliver (that is to meet needs) in your own power, through your own means, and inevitably you will fail. Because you can't meet spiritual needs through the efforts of the flesh, it takes the Holy Spirit to minister effectively to the human spirit.

Here's what happened; they were ultimately looking *to* and trusting *in* themselves to deliver therefore they wound up disappointed, discouraged and downtrodden (defeated). and In that we do well to learn the lesson; to be disappointed in self is only indicative (and speaks to the fact) that we have trusted in self. If you find yourself constantly disappointed in yourself, “Oh I let God down again, I wasn't able to deliver here, or follow through there, I failed in *this* and faltered in *that*.” What that speaks to is the fact that you are looking *to* and trusting *in not* the Lord, but yourself. Why do I say that? Because the bible is clear that the one who trusts in the Lord will *never* be put to shame. “*In You, O Lord, I put my trust; Let me never be put to shame.*” Ps 71:1 and Again, “*For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me.*” Isa 49:23 and Of course Paul quotes that Vs in Romans Ch 9, Peter quotes a similar Vs out of Isaiah 28. The point is clear, God will *always* prove out His victory, His faithfulness both *in* you and *through* you. So when you find yourself disappointed in yourself just remember, you trusted *in* yourself, reset your sights on the Lord and trust in Him, seek Him, ask Him to help you trust Him more.  
**Vs30-31**

Remember Jesus is making His way toward Jerusalem; He's merely months away from the cross, and at this point He's pressing toward the goal, He's headed for Jerusalem and nothing will deter Him or dissuade from His mission.

and So as He passed through Galilee He sought to fly under the radar, stay out of the lime light and off the main stage, He didn't want attention drawn to Himself. Why? Why didn't Jesus seek to address the crowds here, or minister to the multitudes? Notice it in Vs 31, “For He taught His disciples.” There is a time for *public* ministry, and there is a time for *personal* ministry, there are times when Jesus will address crowds of people publicly, evangelically, challenging people collectively. But there are also times when Jesus will seek to minister *to*, prepare and spend time *with* His disciples *exclusively*, to teach His disciples *personally*. and Here He was seeking to spend some alone time simply discipling His disciples, instructing them, preparing them for what lie ahead *both for Him* and of them.

It's true, Jesus is all about people; we developed that reality last week. There's a reason to come down from the Mt, the Mt of the glorious revelation of His person and the overwhelming sensation of His presence that we never want to leave. and That's because there's a whole world of people out there who need what you and I have. It's called a personal relationship with Christ, the forgiveness of our sin, everlasting life in Him.

Jesus is all about outreach, He's all about people, that's why He came to this earth, He didn't have to leave the ivory palaces of heaven to redeem the likes of you and me. But because He *loves* us He gave Himself *for* us. So don't misunderstand what's happening here. He's all about ministry, and He's all about us ministering, but we can't forget that our time of ministry (that is ministering effectively) spills out and overflows as the result of personal time in His presence.

If He hasn't ministered to *us*, we have nothing with which to minister to *others*, if He hasn't spoken to *me*, I have nothing to say and share with *you*. You can not give what you haven't received. We need alone time with Jesus whereby He instructs us, teaches us, reveals things out of His word *to* us; out of *that* we're able to minister to others, we have something to give them, to minister to them. It's been duly noted in the passage previous to this one that if we're not cultivating intimacy with Christ, then we're of little to no spiritual value to others.

So Jesus is safeguarding some time with His disciples. There's about to be a very heavy happening in the life of Christ and it's going to rock their world. He's trying to teach them, to prepare them, to reassure them that what's about to take place isn't an accident, it's not a tragic misfortune, it's the saving grace of the sovereign God. You see the word, "betrayed" there in Vs 31 would be more accurately translated, "delivered." "The Son of Man is being *delivered* into the hands of men." It points not to Judas' betrayal, but to the sovereign act of God in delivering up His Son for the sin of the world. As the scriptures say regarding Jesus, "*...who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.*" Rom 4:25 and That's what Jesus is saying here. He's going to be delivered up into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, but 3 days later He will be raised up for the sake of our justification.

### Vs32

Probably worried about how Jesus might respond, Peter has already been rebuked by Him for seeking to get Him to quit talking about this whole "cross" business back in Ch 8. In Ch 9 they heard Jesus speaking to Moses and Elijah about it, but were told not to tell anyone about what they'd seen until after He'd risen from the dead. and At that point they were questioning amongst themselves, "What does He *mean* by that? Is He speaking metaphorically, somehow symbolically...I don't get it." and Of course we look on in retrospect and think, "How could they miss it?" But it wasn't (and still isn't) common everyday kind of stuff to see people killed and then a few days later resurrect from the dead. So they're just not tracking with Him in a literal way and they're confused about what they think He's trying to say to them. and Here He shares His fate with them again but they're afraid to ask Him about it even though they don't get it.

Listen, there are going to be things be it in the word of God or in the ways of God that we just don't get. But we should *never* be afraid to seek the Lord, and ask the Lord for understanding. Believe me He wants to enlighten us, He wants to impart understanding *to* us, now there will be those times that His answer is simply, "Hey, take it on faith, I'm not asking

you to understand *this* practically, the mechanics of it, or the ‘whys’ concerning it, I’m asking you to trust Me *with* it.” Because as high as the heavens are above the earth are His ways above ours, and His thoughts beyond and above our thoughts; we’re not always going to be able to track *with* the Lord. But we should never be afraid to seek wisdom and understanding *from* the Lord. James tells us, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5* Jeremiah tells us the heart of God to give to us shepherds according to His heart, who will feed us with knowledge and understanding (Jer 3:15).

So there may be things that we don’t get, but don’t be afraid to seek the Lord for understanding.

### **Vs 33-34**

In one respect this blows us away, yet in another respect it’s an incredibly transparent display of human nature, which we all possess. These guys are right back on their favorite topic of debate, they’ve been hanging out *with* the Lord, spending time receiving *from* the Lord, and so one their way to Capernaum (on route to Jerusalem) they’re just debating amongst themselves. and What was the subject at hand; election, God’s sovereignty, end times prophecy, perhaps the Holy Spirit’s ministry? No, which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom... So central in their mind is the Lord setting up His kingdom when they get to Jerusalem that they were arguing about who was going to do what when they got there, who was going to have what status, who would be superior in rank, who would be His chief associate. You might think that just having an extended discourse on His crucifixion they might be a little more *about*, rallied *around*, and concerned *for* the Lord! But no, they’re fighting over who’s going to have what position of power when He establishes His kingdom.

and Position and rank was very important to their culture (as I suppose it is in just about every culture). and Jesus tried to address this before. Remember how He noted that when people were invited to a wedding feast or something that everyone would be volleying for the best seats? Wanting that place of prestige and recognition... and He said, *“When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 14:8-11* Don’t always be looking for the prominent position, take a place of humility (willingly) and God will honor that.

Now they would come to that place, but they weren’t there yet. and We don’t know maybe the whole “Mt of transfiguration” experience served to fuel this fire. Peter, James and John pointing out how Jesus always pulls them aside for special tasks, perhaps pointing out the failure of the other 9, they were just getting at each other. Judas saying, “Hey, I’m the one who’s trusted with the money, I’ve obviously got the most important job,” Thomas saying, “I *doubt* that it’ll be any of you guys.”

Then Jesus did with them what He’s going to do with all of us, He called them to account. He evidently wasn’t walking *beside* them the whole time, but here’s what we need to

see, He knew what was transpiring *among* them the whole time. Jesus knows the heart's of men, He doesn't need to be with you *physically* to know what's going on *in* you *specifically/personally*. Jesus knows your heart, my heart, "*I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind,*" Jer 17:10 now that can be a good thing or a not so good thing, here it was a not so good thing for the disciples.

They kept silent, why? Because they were embarrassed, they were ashamed of what they'd been preoccupied with. This was an, "I've been busted," silence. Which shows us that they knew the Lord wouldn't really be pleased with what their priority was; what He'd been teaching them about humility and jockeying for position was beginning to sink in.

### Vs35-37

The Lord is so good, He handles things so differently than you or I would (at least different than I would). If I were the Lord (which we can all be thankful I'm not) I might be prone to say, "I hate to break it to you goofballs but *I'm* the greatest! You spiritual wimps couldn't even cast a demon out of that young man and now you're all talking about how great you are... 'One of these things is not like the other...'"

But the Lord...He doesn't even *rebuke* them, instead He chooses to *refocus* them, *redirect* them in the way that they think. You might say He's transforming them by the renewing of their minds (Rom12:2). Because they had a certain *ideal* concerning what it meant to be great and it was a worldly ideal. Jesus said, "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you;*" Matt 20:25-26 You can always pick out the important people in the world because they're the ones being pampered, the ones being catered to, their wish is someone else's command. Jesus is saying, "That's not the way it works in the kingdom of God."

So He doesn't squelch their ambition toward greatness, He tells them specifically how to achieve it, He instructs them as to where to aim their energies to achieve it. We read in Vs 35 that, "He sat down." What that meant was that He was getting ready to instruct them. In Jesus' day when a rabbi was getting ready to teach he would sit down, and the people would stand and listen. I'm not sure when that got turned around but obviously that's not how it is today. Be that as it may this was signaling them that He was about to teach them. and So He called them to Himself and said, "If anyone desires to be 1<sup>st</sup>..." and they're at full attention right here, "Jesus is actually getting ready to give us a success seminar, He's going to unlock the mystery behind true greatness." and He says, "...he shall be last of all and servant of all."

and I kinda wonder if that didn't burst their bubble, or take the wind out of their sails. This is more of that backward way of thinking that we brought up a few weeks ago. In the kingdom of God the way up is down, if you want to be exalted you need to walk in humility, if you want to get you need to give, if you want to have life you have to lose your life, and here... to be 1<sup>st</sup> is in reality to be last and to be the greatest of all is to be the *servant* of all. There's nothing wrong with ambition, it just needs to be harnessed and channeled in the right direction. You see greatness in the kingdom of God isn't about status, or superiority, it's about sacrifice and service. Your greatness won't be measured by how many people served *you*, but how many people *you* served.

A man by the name of F.B. Meyer once said: "I used to think that God's gifts were on shelves one above the other; and that the taller we grew in Christian character the easier we

could reach them. I now find that God's gifts are on shelves one beneath the other. It is not a question of growing taller but of stooping lower; that we have to go down, always down, to get His best gifts."

and When Jesus speaks of being last of all and servant of all we should recognize that though He doesn't draw attention to Himself in reality He's describing Himself because He is the greatest in the kingdom of God. He was 1<sup>st</sup> and chose to become last, He was the One served upon the throne of Heaven yet He chose to serve all of mankind upon the cross. He willingly became last of all and servant of all, therefore the bible tells that the Father has exalted Him higher than all and at His name every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.

But that's something else you need to realize here, when Jesus uses the word "servant" He's not using the word "doulos" or "slave" as Paul employed when he referred to himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ This is the word, "Diakonos" from which we get our word "deacon" meaning one who meets the needs of others voluntarily. Not out of the constraint from a servile position, but freely, willingly, you choose to place yourself last. Jesus isn't speaking about learning to become a good loser, to take last place in stride. He's speaking about voluntarily placing yourself beneath another for their benefit. You see, it's not about status, it's about service. The desire to be praised and to gain recognition should be foreign to a follower of Jesus.

and Here's the kicker. He qualifies the words "last" and "servant" with these words, "of all." Hey, I don't mind being the servant of *some*, especially those people whom I think might be able to help me along in life, but... of all?

### **Vs36-37**

Because of our culture we miss a bit of the impact of this but Jesus was dropping a bomb on these guys, this was radical! Because in that day kids were actually lesser on the social totem pole than slaves, they were basically property, loved, but zero social status. When they walked into that room those disciples didn't even notice that child, they didn't give him the time of day. Now, I don't want to take away from what Jesus is doing here because when He grabbed that child, He was referencing a literal child. and We're to receive children, not just tolerate them, but note the value *of* them, seek to minister *to* them, invest the love and grace of God *in* them. Or another way to understand that, children's ministry needs to be a major priority. Yet at the same time the message Jesus is sending out is that there is no one so low on the social status bar that they're not worth our time. We're not merely to serve those who can benefit us, we're not to look to be around the movers and the shakers in life, (the who's who) we should gravitate toward, and minister to those whom society might peg as otherwise "insignificant." If anything Jesus is saying, "When you see that person whom others are ignoring, the one who's just sort of in the shadows of the room, go to them, extend yourself to them, minister in My name to them." Because when we receive that child, when we receive the "socially insignificant" in Jesus' name (because of our desire to show and share the love of Christ) let me tell you something, we're receiving Christ. It's interesting to note that the word "servant" and the word "child" are the same in Aramaic (a language that Jesus spoke) so it's ez to see how He drew the connection.

But a "status conscious" heart, wanting to be someone and served by others will cause us to hit a stone wall in our spiritual growth.

**Vs 38**

John says, “Hey speaking of doing things in Your name, we saw a guy casting out demon’s in Your name, and we kept telling him to quit it because he wasn’t in our group... He wasn’t in our denomination so we knew he couldn’t be doing things right.” That’s really what this boils down to, and it probably made matters all the more hostile considering their crew just failed at casting out a demon and this guy is getting the job done. It’s funny how that seeing someone else do well in the field that we seek to serve in can actually make us angry rather than rejoice with them that the Lord is blessing the work. But you see this whole contention that exists between denominations is nothing new. These guys didn’t want anyone doing anything in the name of the Lord who wasn’t in their circle with the Lord.

**Vs39-41**

You ever wonder if Jesus was ever thinking, “When will you knuckle heads ever get it!” He says, “What are you doing, don’t forbid him...encourage him!” You’re not going to do a good work in the name of Christ and then turn around and bad mouth Christ. So if he’s not against us, he’s on our side. At least in some measure, hey they may not do things exactly like we would, who cares? Maybe they dress weird, or get all worked up and eccentrically emotionally charged. But next time you’re seeing that guy on TV who is preaching Jesus in a way that makes you go, “Please, stop!” Perhaps we should just be thankful that he’s not seeking to exalt the name of Muhammad, of Buddha, he’s preaching Jesus and in that much we can rejoice. That’s what Paul said, people preach Jesus for all kinds of reasons and that’ll be settled when they stand before the Lord. But their getting the name of Christ out there and in that I’ll rejoice.

If he’s not against us, he’s for us, now in Matt 12:30 Jesus said, *“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.”* So don’t think that there’s a neutral zone out there. Jesus made it very clear that He draws a line in the dirt and we have to decide on which side of the line we stand, for or against. The point here is that this guy is out there ministering in mighty ways in My name and you’re thinking he’s doing something wrong? Hey whoever does a miniscule thing in My name will by no means lose their reward, even if they give you a cup of water because you belong to Christ. The point being that God isn’t looking to the gift so much as He is the heart behind giving it.

**Vs42**

Back to the child in their midst, whom Jesus has taken up in His arms (perhaps contrast demon’s objective, Vs the love that Christ is demonstrating) He says, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better if they had a millstone tied around their neck and they were tossed into the midst of the sea.” and We go, “Wow Jesus, sounds like the cement shoes of the mafia or something.” and For times sake I’ll just break it down quickly, there will be radical discipline that awaits the individual who takes a child (literally or spiritually, someone weak in the faith) and somehow poisons them in such a way as to take them and turn them from Christ.

This isn’t referencing a little rock around someone’s neck, but rather those giant millstones that were pulled in circles behind a donkey to crush grain. Jesus says, “You take someone and poison them in a way as to turn them away from Me, having a millstone tied around your neck, dangling suspended in the darkness of the deep with the life drowned out of

you would be the better option if you had the choice.” and Yet it’s amazing to me how fast we are, how willing we are to pull someone out into the mire of our discord or contention, fill them full of bitterness concerning someone or some situation. Then to make matters worse, time goes by we reconcile and it’s like no big deal, but they’re left there covered in all this debris... Maybe you’ve been around awhile, have a few miles on you in Christ, so maybe you can get over it. But maybe they can’t...now what? You’ve stumbled them, they got so radically offended by that slant you placed on them concerning the situation that they think, “Forget it, I’m out” and they slide back into the world. Listen, you never know how someone will react or respond in a situation like that. Be careful, what a fearful exhortation to be careful that we what? Help people in their walk with Christ, not hinder them.

### **Vs 43-48**

Jesus goes from exhorting us to not stumble others to be careful not to engage in sin ourselves. This is what we might call an urgent exhortation unto personal holiness. Yeah, we don’t want to stumble others, but neither do we want to sin ourselves. and What He is saying here is that there is a literal place called *hell* (this isn’t the word Sheol, it’s the word Gehenna, speaking of the ultimate, and final destiny of the ungodly) and it’s so horrible, so unbelievably excruciating that we should be willing to go to *any length* to avoid it. and Don’t be confused here it’s not the mutilation of the flesh that Jesus is speaking about here it’s the mortification of the flesh that’s in view. What ever it is that’s leading you into compromise or sin, cut it off, get rid of it. You see the problem with taking the words Jesus is saying here in a literal fashion is that it doesn’t go far enough. I can pluck out my eyes, cut off my hands and feet and still be the most morally defiled man alive, because the problem is in my heart and in my mind.

But Jesus is addressing the whole of my life, my hand, (the things I do) my foot (the places I go), and my eye (the things I see). I need to safeguard these areas of my life with an intensity.

Now that begs the question, are there things that you’re doing, places you’re visiting after work or school, things that you’re watching or websites you’re visiting that are causing you to engage in sinful activity if not physically then inwardly in your heart? If so, cut it off, get rid of it, don’t go there, crucify the flesh. Because you’re toying with eternity, did you catch that? He said, the worm doesn’t die, the fire isn’t quenched. You know what that speaks to? Eternity, it never ends, torment inwardly (the worm) tortured outwardly (the fire), throughout eternity. Do what you have to do, seek to lead a holy life at all costs, that’s what Jesus is saying. and It’s going to call for sacrifice, some things or some people that mean a lot to you might have to go.

### **Vs49-50**

with purified salt these days we lose a little here but in Jesus’ day there were impurities in salt and in time it could lose its ability to season and preserve and when it loses the ability to do what it was intended to do what value is it? and Perhaps we’ll be able to dip into this next time but for now just remember that every life will go through the fire. and It will either be the purifying fire of God, the refiners fire that seasons us, stretches us, prepares us for what He has for us. Or it’ll be the fires of hell having rejected Jesus Christ refusing to repent. Satan promises you glory but leaves you suffering, Jesus promises you suffering but in the end ushers you into glory.

So have salt in yourselves (your vertical relationship with God, stay closely connected to Him) and have peace with one another, don't be bickering, fight with each other, finding fault in each other, arguing over or jockeying for position, don't make problems for one another, have peace with one another.

Prayer Points:

Lord rearrange our hearts, set our priority and our perspective, our ambitions in a proper direction. To choose willfully to walk in humility, to serve others with out regard to what they might be able to do for us personally, but that we might be able to show and share Your love with them openly and freely with out an underlying agenda. and May we take care to be sensitive to our brothers and sisters around us, that we not stumble them or in any way poison or embitter them because of some problem or sin that's in *us*. Help us to be eager to repent, to get along, and to lead lives of personal holiness.

If God is dealing with you today I would encourage you to receive the sense of urgency. and It's not a scare tactic but Jesus wants us to know that hell is a real place, it's an eternal place and He laid down His life to spare us the penalty of our sin. He's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, don't resist Him, receive Him, open your heart *to* Him and let Him in. He'll forgive you of your sin, make you brand new and write your name in His book of life.