

Title: GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM, MARK 9:30-37
(Chatham, NJ; 09/23/12, AM) [D – Narrative Analysis]

Theme: In the Kingdom of God humility, service, and obedience define greatness.

Purpose: Not only to explain these qualifications but to encourage the audience to adopt them.

Introduction:

1. This is the second time Jesus teaches the disciples about his death (30-32).
2. After a discussion about who is the greatest, Jesus redefines greatness.
3. This doesn't deny that we can and should strive for excellence as mentioned last week.
4. The disciples' silence (34) suggests guilt or self-consciousness (silence in 1 Kings 18:21).
5. Visualize how this discussion takes place: in a house (33), with Jesus sitting (35), and eventually with a child in his arms (36).
6. Jesus defines greatness in three ways: humility, service, and obedience.

I. Humility – to be first, you have to be last

A. Wisdom

1. "Understanding is a matter of character as well as intelligence."
2. James 3:13 discusses wisdom
3. Selfish ambition and jealousy are not God's wisdom
4. Demonstrated by "good conduct" done with meekness
5. Characteristic of meekness provides the foundation for wisdom

B. Wisdom issues in proper behavior (good conduct)

1. Phil. 2:3 – consider others better than yourself
2. Ephesians 4:2 – humility and gentleness are essential to our calling
3. 1 Peter 5:5 – humility is the primary virtue in interaction in the church, including the leaders who are told not to domineer and younger members who are told to be subject to those who are older

II. Service – must be a "servant of all"

A. Bottom up not top down leadership

1. A paradox of our faith: only an apparent contradiction
2. Jesus came to serve not to be served, Mark 10:45
3. The Apostle Paul often called himself a bondservant of God
4. Gal. 5:13 exhorts us to use our freedom to "serve one another" through love

B. A different kind of authority

1. God can demand our loyalty because he is the sovereign ruler of the universe
2. Yet he sent his son to serve us by dieing on a cross, Phil. 2:8 (read)
3. To his inherent authority, Jesus adds personal authority (his activity endeared us to him)
4. Gene Peck used to talk about "earning the right to speak"
5. Jesus is advocating essentially an entirely different kind of authority, one that doesn't lord it over others but one that elicits our loyalty by love and service
6. Here is where he puts a child in his arms: receive a child=receive me=receive him who sent me (God)
7. Children are the image of the powerless (note abortion issue); they have no ability to return favors or advance careers
8. How do we treat those who have nothing to offer us?

III. Obedience, Matthew 5:19

- A. To relax or to obey them
 - 1. Those who relax them will be called "least" in the kingdom
 - 2. Those who do them and teach others to do them will be called "great"
 - 3. Though we are not under the condemnation of the Law, we are still called to obey them
 - 4. Commandments are not suggestions
 - 5. Greatness defined by obedience and by insisting that others make the same, right moral choices

- B. When others fail
 - 1. How do you feel when religious and political leaders blatantly fail to observe the commands of God and of country?
 - 2. Clergy and sexual abuse has claimed a lot of victims; not only are they emotionally scarred, but they have deep gashes in their faith
 - 3. Former Gov. Spitzer had been known as an attack dog against violators of many of New York's laws as a state attorney general
 - 4. Yet as governor he solicited prostitutes
 - 5. Violators of God's laws are not on God's team, Psalm 1
 - 6. They are considered least in the Kingdom of Heaven
 - 7. Greatness is obedience

Conclusion:

- 1. Do we seek God's favor or the favor of men (John 5:44)?
- 2. Christ changes our entire perception of greatness, but we must seek his favor.
- 3. He calls all of us to humility, service, and obedience.
- 4. Let us strive for this greatness in all we do.