

IMPROVING OUR SERVE

Mark 9:30-37

Last Tuesday when we had the really heavy downpour and flash flood warnings, water washed around the pipe that serves as the bridge into our cul-de-sac. As a result it washed out about a 12 foot swath of crushed asphalt recently put down by our neighbor Steve Shockey. Another neighbor discovered and removed a sheet of plywood that was blocking the pipe. Wednesday, when another downpour hit, with the blockage removed, the water stayed in the pipe and no further damage was done to the road.

Jesus wants His love to flow freely in His church, but like that piece of plywood, ego and status consciousness can block the flow. Jesus confronted this problem in His disciples as they returned from their ministry tour in Caesarea Philippi to Capernaum.

Jesus Taught the Disciples About His Death and Resurrection Months Before It Occurred (9:30-32)

Mark 9:30-32 (ESV)

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.

Jesus and the disciples had been in the area of Caesarea Phillipi about 25 miles northeast of Galilee (8:27). As verse 30 indicates, by this time in His ministry (3 years), Jesus’ focus shifted from public ministry to private mentoring of His disciples. This southerly movement is the beginning of their trek to Jerusalem where the things Jesus was teaching them would take place. The verb tenses in verse 31 indicate that on this leg of their journey Jesus was continuously teaching them that He would be delivered into the hands of men, be killed and rise on the third day. Jesus’ foretelling of His death and resurrection make clear He was not a hapless victim of His enemies. Knowing Himself to be the Messiah, Jesus was informed by the Scriptures (Psalm 22, Isaiah 52-53) and the Holy Spirit that it was the Father’s will to deliver Him into the hands of His enemies that He might die for the sins of the people and rise on the third day (Isaiah 53:10).

Jesus is the only religious figure to predict and fulfill His death and resurrection. Over five hundred eyewitnesses saw Jesus alive in the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension. The Apostle Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 (ESV)

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most

of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Over the next several decades the eleven disciples declared the death and resurrection of Jesus. They were persecuted and martyred for their message, but to a man they never recanted their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus.

Why did the Father send Jesus and why did Jesus willingly come to die and rise again?

John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

God loves you. Jesus took the punishment for your sin so that you don't have to perish, separated from God in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). By faith, receive the gift of Jesus' death and resurrection on your behalf and you will receive eternal life.

To many of us, on this side of the Cross and empty tomb these truths are very familiar. But prior to the Cross, the disciples struggled mightily to understand the idea of a suffering Messiah. Their paradigm was of a triumphant Messiah.

Mark 9:32 (ESV)

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

We've seen this struggle before when Jesus first revealed His suffering and Peter rebuked Him (Mark 8:31-33). Perhaps that was why they were afraid to ask Jesus about these things because they didn't want another rebuke. Or perhaps they were afraid because these things were painful to think about and they figured the less they knew the better. As one author writes, “They understand enough to be afraid to ask to understand more.”¹

As the disciples walked the road from Caesarea Philippi to Capernaum we discover they were talking about something else amongst themselves.

Jesus Radically Redefines Greatness (9:33-37)

While Jesus' eyes are fixed on His death and resurrection, the disciples are preoccupied with the question of who amongst them is the greatest. Perhaps Peter, James and John provoked this argument by claiming higher status on the basis of their being selected to accompany Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration (9:2-8).

Mark 9:33-35 (ESV)

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. 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.”

The disciples were like guilty boys caught with their hands in the cookie jar. No one answered; they were embarrassed and guilty. Captives of their culture they jockeyed for

¹ E. Best as quoted by R.T. France in *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002.

position. Such status consciousness is what they had seen modeled by their spiritual leaders.

Matthew 23:1–7 (ESV)

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

In Jewish culture, the sign of greatness was *to be served*. In Jesus’ Kingdom the one *who serves is great*.

The disciples would struggle to embrace Jesus’ radical ethic even on the night of His betrayal. As they gathered for the Passover meal none of them humbled themselves to serve their companions by washing their feet. But what did Jesus do?

John 13:4–5, 12-17 (ESV)

He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Jesus practiced what He preached.

His teaching was, and is, as one writer put it, *counter-natural*. The natural inclination of our hearts is to dominate; to build our own kingdoms and have people serve us. It is our core problem of *self-centeredness*. We believe the lie that if the people in our lives would just do what we want them to do we will be happy. The divine nature is just the opposite; the divine nature is *other-centered*. Is that not what we see in Jesus?

Philippians 2:5–9 (HCSB)

⁵ Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. ⁷ Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, ⁸ He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name,

Jesus lived the perfect, most fulfilled human life ever lived – *as a servant!* Though it is counter-intuitive to our sinful minds, Jesus calls us to believe that we will experience fulfillment in serving.

Jesus is not just talking about serving in a ministry at church. He is talking about our *self-identification*. We are to understand that *we are servants*. In our “self-speak” we should be reminding ourselves constantly that “I am a servant”. At work, “I am a servant” whether I am the company CEO, a department head or an intern. At school “I am a servant” whether I am the principal, a teacher, a star athlete, one of the popular kids or one of the regulars just doing my thing. At home “I am a servant” whether I’m the dad, mom, son or daughter. At church, “I am a servant” whether I’m the pastor or an elder or a deacon or a teacher or an usher or a sound tech.

When we rightly see ourselves as servants, God’s love can freely flow in the church family unimpeded by the pettiness of status. As servants, we’re freed to love everyone in the family. I think this is what Jesus was illustrating when He took a little child into His arms.²

Mark 9:36-37 (ESV)

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.”

I love R. Kent Hughes’ comment on this scene:

Jesus’ dramatization is a call to a wonderful, liberating spiritual egalitarianism. We are to receive all of God’s people as we do children, with no thought of their accomplishments, their influence, their fame, or their gifts, but simply because they are his children.³

Let us pray for ourselves and one another that the Spirit would so renew our minds and transform our character to be servants like Jesus and that His love would flow freely through us. Let us pray God to heal those wounds that hold us back from loving. Let us pray God to give us courage where there is fear. Let us repent of hard hearts and pray God fill us with His love for others.

² Some suggest that if they were in Peter’s home, the child may actually be one of Peter’s children.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 32–33.