

The Way of Jesus

Mark 9:30-50; July 25, 2021

Introduction:

One of the highlights of my summer has been seeing these 44 GenSend students wrestle with the cost of discipleship. Putting their yes on the table and being willing to do and go whatever Jesus wants of them. That's what this section in Mark is all about. Following Jesus in all of life.

Context:

This section provides object lessons and teaching that further fleshes out Jesus' call to discipleship in Mark 8:34: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Mark 8:34. It's Jesus pulling his disciples aside and saying, "Hey, let me tell you a little bit more about what it means to deny yourself, take of your cross and follow me."

Let's dive into the text.

Read Mark 9:30-41.

The first truth that Jesus teaches his disciples is this:

I. Humble Service is the Way to Greatness (30-41).

Jesus is the perfect example of humble service: the Passion (30-32).

- This Jesus' second mention of his pending arrest, death and resurrection (cf. 8:31).
 - The implied agent here seems to be God (cf. Isa. 53;6, 12; Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:32).
 - Salvation is possible for us because God killed Jesus instead of us.
- Jesus' life, death and resurrection are the perfect picture of humility and service.
 - This announcement not only predicts Jesus' fate but it is also an example of the life of service that disciples are to live.
- This is what Philippians 2 is all about:

*"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied** himself, by taking the form of a **servant**, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he **humbled** himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*
(Philippians 2:5-8, ESV)

- Jesus went from heaven to crucifixion: true humility and service. No one has humbled themselves more than Jesus.
- This is why the foundational call to discipleship is to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus.
 - Growth in humility begins at the cross.
 - This passage juxtaposed with the following verses reveal a contrast between Jesus' humility and the disciples' desire for recognition.

- Humility defined:
 - “A truly gospel humble person is not a self-hating person or a self-loving person, but a self-forgetful person” (Tim Keller).
 - Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less and Jesus more.

Jesus’ Teaching and Object Lesson on True Greatness (33-37).

- So when they arrive at Capernaum, they gather in the house (possibly Peter’s; cf. Mark 1:29) and Jesus asks them: “What were you discussing on the way?”
 - Why were they discussing greatness?
 - Possibly it was sparked by Jesus selecting Peter, James and John for the trip up the mountain, leaving the others frustrated.
 - This could have been even more heightened after their humiliation over the failed exorcism.
 - It’s possible they are also wondering who will take the leader after Jesus’ death.
 - Did Jesus just happen to overhear their conversation?
 - Did Jesus, being fully God, know what they were discussing?
 - Their silence is telling. They are probably full of guilt and shame.
 - What’s clear is that they have remained deaf to what Jesus has taught them about true greatness (cf. 8:34-35).
- “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all”
 - Jesus doesn’t criticize their pursuit of greatness. Why?
 - God created us to pursue greatness and significance; to make our lives count.
 - Jesus is just redefining true greatness.
 - But this longing is distorted by sin:
 - Pride: we want to be known as great. Our joy comes from others praising us.
 - Are you upset if you are not praised for your service or work?
 - Arrogance: we want to be greater than someone else. Our joy comes from thinking we are greater than others.
 - Do you seek credit for what others have done?
 - Do you think you have something valuable to say about almost everything?
 - Pride must be crushed:
 - “*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.*” (Proverbs 11:2, ESV)
 - “*But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*” (James 4:6, ESV)
 - So what is true greatness?
 - It’s the willingness to be last as opposed to being first while others are

- second, third, fourth and last.
 - It's striving to serve as many people as you possibly can.
 - Greatness according to God is available to every believer in the common and simple tasks of serving others.
- Object lesson: He puts a child in the midst of them and then embraces this child.
 - Why does he embrace a child?
 - There is nothing you gain in return from serving a child.
 - You probably aren't going to receive praise from a child.
 - They might even take for granted your care of them.
 - They aren't going to make a big deal of you serving them.
 - The point: If you want to be great, look for ways to serve those who have no standing in this world. Care for those no one else cares for.
 - Children, more than any other kind of people, prove how great you really are:
 - Do you live to serve?
 - Do you live to be praised?
- The point of the object lesson: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."
 - The highest pursuit in serving is actually not the child, but God.
 - You serve "in Jesus' name" to get God.
 - Jesus isn't just calling you to live a life of self-sacrifice, he's calling you to reject man's praise and pursue God.
 - You serve children in order to receive God.

Other ministers of the gospel and serving Jesus (38-41).

- Questions:
 - Must all disciples belong to us?
 - Can a genuine follower of Jesus exist outside off our circle?
- John's response shows almost a complete disregard of the lessons from the previous story.
 - John comes across as showing entitlement of privilege and exclusion.
 - While John is upset that he's not following *us*, his concern should be about this man following *Jesus*.
- Additionally, it's ironic that the disciples are telling this man to stop doing what they could not do in 9:14-29.
- The *gar* clauses offers three grounds for a more tolerant attitude:
 - "For no one who does a mighty work in my name..."
 - The fact that he can do a powerful miracle shoes that he cannot be an enemy.
 - "For the one who is not against us is for us"
 - A warning against cliquishness.
 - Yes, there are opponents and outsiders, but we should be cautious in drawing lines of demarcation.

- “For...whoever give you a cup of water...”
 - A final reminder:
 - The humblest act of kindness does not go unrewarded by God.

Do you want a marker to evaluate your health and maturity as a follower of Jesus? What Jesus gives us here is one of the key markers, one of the key pursuits of a maturing disciple of Jesus.

- **Serve with intentional love in the home, church and city.**

Serve in the **home**:

- Will you fight with your siblings over who sits in the front seat?
- When your parents ask you to do something, do you wait to see if one of your other siblings will respond first?
- Men, do you put the same time and energy into loving and serving your spouse as you do yourself?

Serve in the **church**

- Are you willing, will you take a next step to serve in a ministry where few may ever notice?
- Venue Team? Kids?

Serve in the **city**

- How can you serve your neighbors?
- How can you serve your co-workers, and not just so you can get a promotion?

Read Mark 9:42-50.

The second truth that Jesus teaches his disciples is this:

II. Self-Denial is the Way to Eternal Life (42-50).

This passage shows us the cost and serious nature of discipleship. Jesus warns of sin’s danger to others as well to ourselves. In each case, there is extreme danger.

Sin’s danger to others (42).

- Verse 42 is a hinge verse tying these sections together.
 - It repeats the thought of v. 41 that whatever is done to a follower of Jesus, good or bad, is done to Jesus himself.
 - V. 41: the positive: you do good and are rewarded.
 - V. 42: the negative: you cause them to stumble and are punished.
 - The lesson of the millstone: Another way to say this is “to be hurled into the ocean with a pair of cement shoes” (Akin).
 - This imagery is dreadful: drowning is a horrible form of death.
 - “Little ones” doesn’t refer to children but to those “who believe in me,” that is Jesus’ disciples.

- What's this warning all about?
 - Some commentators suggest that Jesus is still addressing pride and that this "watery grave" was a graphic way for Jesus to convey God's wrath against spiritual pride (so Edwards and Akin).
 - Not only should disciples watch their own lives, we are responsible for making sure we don't inhibit, injure or destroy the faith of another disciple.

Sin's danger to ourselves (43-48).

Textual variant (see note #6 add the end of v. 43 in the ESV):

- "Some manuscripts add verses 44 and 46 (which are identical with verse 48)."

An Extreme Metaphor for Extreme Danger

1. The Extreme Danger: Hell

What does this passage teach us about hell (v. 43, 45, 47).

- The Greek work used here is *gehenna*.
- *Gehenna* comes from the Hebrew *ge-hinnom* which refers to the "Vally of Hinnom." This valley was where Kings Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Chr 28:3; 33:6) offered human sacrifices.
- "The prophets proclaimed oracles of doom on it, and *gehinnom* became a symbol of final judgment (Isa 31:9; Jer 7:31-32; 19:6)" (Akin).
- V. 48 is a quote of Isa. 66:24 (the last veres in Isaiah in a section on God's final judgment).

"And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." (Isaiah 66:24, ESV)

- What does this passage teach us about hell? Unquenchable fire
 - Other passages on hell: Matt 3:12; 8:12; 13:42; 18:8-9; 22:13 25:30, 41, 46; Rev 20:10; 14-15.

The Judgment (from RHC Statement of Faith)

God has appointed a day, wherein He will judge the world by Jesus Christ, when every one shall receive according to his deeds; the wicked shall go into everlasting and conscious punishment and the righteous into everlasting life (Matt. 25:46; John 5:22, 27-29; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:6-11; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 7:13-17; 14:9-11).

- What makes hell so tragic is that it's eternal separation from God, the source of life and all things good.

Apologetic Sidebar:

- How could a loving God send people to hell?

- Rebecca McLaughlin in her recent book *Confronting Christianity* devotes an entire chapter to this topic. She helps us see that we cannot separate God's love and God's judgment.

“Think of the anger you feel when you see school children shot, women raped, or people beaten because of the color of their skin. Think of your anger at the slave trade, the Holocaust, and global sex trafficking. When you analyze that anger, its root is love....And the more we love, the more easily our anger is kindled. We rush to defend our children from the least attack because we love them: anyone who harms them inspires our fury.”

She then takes us to the cross of Christ and the gospel:

“Imagine that this kind of love-motivated anger is so deeply entrenched in the heart of God that your own commitment to justice is like a drop in the ocean....God's anger at the Holocaust, God's anger at the slave trade, God's anger at abuse and murder and cruelty and neglect was all poured out on Jesus on the cross. That was what [Jesus] dreaded: not the nails in his hands.”

“Every evil of our hearts has been laid on him and paid for by his death, and each of his beautiful acts of love is credited to our account. We have all rejected God and deserve his rejection in return. The choice we have is this: to face hell by ourselves or to hide ourselves in Christ.”

- Common misbelief: Most people are good and the balance of the scale will tip towards heaven over hell.
 - Rarely do you find an obituary where it says someone is going to hell.
 - The reality: we all deserve hell.
- The choice is between the kingdom of God (life) and “unquenchable fire.”

Transition: “Extreme danger calls for extreme measures of escape” (Jon Bloom).

2. The Extreme Metaphor: Mutilation

- Eyes, hands and feet are all-inclusive of what we see, what we do and where we go (so Akin, Edwards). They stand for sins that can be committed with these body parts. Paul speaks of a similar way in Rom. 6:12-13.

“*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness...*” (Romans 6:12–13a, ESV)

- *Eye* could represent coveting, lust or adultery. *Hand* could represent theft or murder. *Feet* could represent going somewhere to commit a sinful act.

What does Jesus NOT mean by this metaphor?

- Jesus did not intend for this to be taken literally.
 - Bodily mutilation was forbidden in Judaism (cf. Deut. 14:1; 1 Kgs 18:28; Zech.

13:6).

- Cutting off your hand and foot and tearing out your eye will do nothing to help you gain eternal life.
 - Your hands don't sin because of nerves and muscles.
 - You sin because of something so much deeper. Sin flows from the sinfulness in our hearts.
- Our temptation:
 - The discount or minimize the importance of these verses.
 - We can't do this.

What does Jesus mean by this metaphor?

- How are we to understand this passage in light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?
 - Because of Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death, I can be forgiven of my sin.
 - The death of Christ cancels the debt that I owe for my sin. Jesus bore God's wrath for every single one of my sins (past, present and future). This such good news.
 - My receiving of forgiveness because of the death of Christ should not lead me to the minimizing of but rather to the empowering to kill sin by the Spirit.
 - Paul argues this way in Romans 6.
 - *How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Rom. 6:2).*
 - *For one who has died has been set free from sin (Rom. 6:6).*
 - *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11).*
 - *Let no sin therefore reign...but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness" (Rom. 6:12, 13).*
 - *"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." (Rom. 8:12-13)*
- What Jesus is teaching here is not mutilation but mortification.
 - "A saving faith is a fighting faith" (Akin).
 - There's no room for passivity toward sin in our lives. As John Owen says, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you."
 - This is a radical picture of an assault and warfare against our own sin. We must consciously kill our sin by Spirit-empowered effort.
 - Our warfare on our heart must be of the intensity of chopping off a hand and gouging out an eye.
- Anything that is a potential stumbling block for sin in your life must be amputated.
 - What in your life needs to be cutoff? A habit, a relationship, a career, a personal freedom.
 - What in your life is not fueling passion and joy for God?

- Nothing should stand in the way of eternal life.
- How do we do this: Surrender daily to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This is one of the key pursuits of a maturing disciple of Jesus.
 - Rom. 8: we set our minds on the things of the Spirit.

Salted with Fire (49-50).

- V. 49 occurs only here and in no other Gospel, so it must be significant for Mark.
- Most commentators agree that it's best to understand these verses against the background of temple sacrifice where fire and salt played indispensable roles.
 - Burnt offerings were required to be wholly consumed by fire in order to be acceptable.
 - Salt was a sign of the covenant and was required to accompany all sacrifices.

“You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.”
(Leviticus 2:13, ESV; cf. Exod 30:35)

- For unbelievers, being salted with fire refers to the perpetual fires of final judgment in hell.
- For believers, salt and fire are symbols of the refining trials and costs of discipleship that mark the road to true greatness.
 - Applied to disciples, this is a picture of someone who follows Jesus as totally dedicated to God's service.
 - The sacrifice pleasing to God is the one who is a servant of all, one who nurtures, rather than destroys the faith of another, the one who forsakes everything to follow Jesus. Such a person is a living sacrifice (cf. Rom. 12:1).
 - A disciples who has been “salted with fire” is a “salty” disciple. Such a life and disciple is a picture of hope to the world (cf. Matt. 5:13-14).
 - If you don't remain faithful to Jesus and kill sin with Spirit empowered effort, your life will have no preserving influence on this world.
- One specific example and application of “good salt” is that disciples should be cultivating peaceful relationships.
 - Another pursuit of a maturing disciple: Spend time building healthy relationships with RHC Family.

The Point: Deny yourself and think about yourself less and Jesus more.

Prelude the Lord's Supper as a time to reflect on and confess sin.

Pray