

Turning Greatness Upside Down

(Mark 10:35-45)

(preached 7/19/15 Pine Grove BC)

Introduction

In 1986, two Russian ships collided in the Black Sea in the night killing 398 people.

After an investigation of the accident, the cause of the accident was stubborn pride on the part of both of the ships captains.

According to the report on the cause of the disaster, both ship captains were well aware that the ships were on a collision course.

They had even communicated with one another 45 before the accident happened.

The reason they collided is not because radar failed to alert them.

It isn't because there was a heavy fog that night.

No, the reason they collided was not an equipment or weather malfunction...

The reason they collided is because neither captain wanted to yield his course to the other.

It was a sign of weakness to submit to the other ship, so both captains held on to their authority and pride until it led to a catastrophe.

Such is the nature of pride in a person.

It will blind a person so much that they can't even tell right from wrong.

It will make a person refuse to admit that they are wrong even if it costs them their life.

Pride is the really the root of all sin because pride seeks to please only self.

In the time that I have been here, we have talked about pride on a number of occasions.

On Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, and even a few times already in the gospel of Mark.

And why is that?

Because the sin of pride is all over the Bible...

Pride caused Satan to be kicked out of heaven.

Pride caused Adam and Eve to eat the fruit and commit the first sin.

Because they wanted to be like God.

Pride was in the garden and it has been all over the globe since then.

Our world is consumed with it, blinded by it, but often unaware they are committing it.

Pride is deceptive and often disguises itself in other ways in our lives.

Today, Jesus is going to teach the disciples and us to avoid the sin of pride.

He is going to show us the opposite of pride and that is true humility.

Some of you may say,...

“Haven’t we already heard this teaching in Mark already?”

And you would be right.

But just like the disciples, we cannot hear this teaching on the dangers of pride too much.

We, just like them, seem to have short attention spans, and only short-term memory at times.

So, let’s open our Bibles to Mark chapter 10, and let’s look at a section of Scripture that I have entitled...

Turning Greatness Upside Down

I am not going to read this entire section at once, but rather we will move through it as it happens...

We are going to see two options on how to be great in God's eyes...

The First option for greatness is...

I. Greatness by Grabbing (35-41)

The second option for greatness is....

II. Greatness by Giving (42-45)

And let me add this before we start, there is nothing wrong with wanting to be great in God's kingdom.

In fact, that is the only thing in this world worthy of spending time to be great at...

Everything that we pursue greatness in will one day disappear, but God's kingdom will endure forever...

That is not to say that we shouldn't aim for excellence in the things that we do upon the earth..

The Bible says that we should seek to work with all our heart no matter what we do on the earth....

But we must always remember that the things of the earth will eventually all pass away...

And the only thing left will be God's Word and his Kingdom...

Therefore, seeking to be great in the kingdom of God is a good thing...

But we must not think that greatness in God's kingdom is acquired the same way that greatness is acquired on this earth....

No, greatness in the kingdom does not come the way we think...

Instead, Jesus is going to teach that greatness in the kingdom comes in a most unusual way...

But first, let's begin with the wrong way to try and be great...

And that is by trying to GRAB GREATNESS....

I. Greatness by Grabbing (35-41)

Let's read verse 35...

³⁵ *[m] James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, *came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You."*

Now, if you remember from last week, Jesus is headed up to Jerusalem.

Passover is approaching, and so is Jesus' trial and crucifixion.

He is headed up to Jerusalem, where he will be sentenced to die on a cross as the ultimate Passover lamb...

We talked about this journey last week.

Jesus and the disciples and a group of other travelers are all leaving Perea on the east side of the Jordan River and making the climb up to Jerusalem.

It is a change in altitude of 4000 feet in about 20 miles..

From the lowest point on the earth, which is the area around the Dead sea all the way up to Jerusalem.

And so this whoel group of people is with Jesus and James and John approach Jesus with a request...

Matthew also records this scene in his gospel, and he says this conversation started when James and John's mother approached Jesus with a question...

According to Matthew's gospel, she requested this in Matthew 20:21...

“Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.”

We know by putting together other Scriptures that her name was most likely Salome...

And it is highly likely that she was Mary's sister..

This would make her Jesus aunt...

And so what we see here is a little “family pressure” being placed on Jesus.....

“Jesus, since James and John are family, how about a good seat for them in the kingdom...?”

And then we see here in Mark that James and John even joined in the conversation by adding to their mother's request...

They say, “Jesus, we want you to do whatever we ask you to do.”

Now, honestly, this is so childish in a number of ways...

First, they have gotten their mother to approach Jesus for them...

Like little kids, they are probably hiding behind her while she asks for a favor from Jesus...

And then even when they show enough courage to approach Jesus, they act like kids again by asking Jesus to say yes even before they ask the question...

You ever had a child or grandchild come up to you and the first thing out of their mouth was this...

“Please say yes....please say yes.”

And you say, “what do you want me to say yes to?”

And that’s the same answer that Jesus gives in verse 36 to these childish actions....

Verse 36..

³⁶ And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

Jesus is not going to be tricked into filling a request until HE knows what it is...

It doesn’t matter that these are his disciples...

It doesn’t matter that their mother is most likely Jesus’ aunt.

They can act childishly, but Jesus is not going to grant a request until he knows what they want...

So they spit it out in verse 37...

37 They said to Him, “^dGrant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.”

First, let me say something positive about their request.

We are going to look at what was wrong with this for the rest of the time, but let me compliment James and John on one thing...

They were sure that Jesus was the Messiah, and they were sure that His kingdom was going to prevail in this world.

If nothing else, that put them light years ahead of some many people in this world...

Who are simply unsure if Jesus is who He says He is...

Because if He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, there is no doubt where your love and loyalty should lie in this world...

If Jesus is truly God's Son sent to die for sin and then returning to reign over this earth, you would be a fool to reject His Kingship and Lordship...

If what the Bible says is true about Jesus, a man or woman would stand no chance in this world or in the world to come without Him...

James and John may have been blinded by pride here, but they knew Who Jesus was, and they knew that His kingdom would endure forever...

Do you believe that this morning?

Do you think is who he claims to be?

Do you understand that the Bible says you first of all need to submit to His Lordship by repenting of your sin and trusting in Him?

If Jesus is the King of kings, today is the day to make sure you are in His kingdom...

And the only way into the kingdom is by turning from your sin and placing your faith in the King..

James and John believed in the King, and they knew that His kingdom would prevail....

They are simply trying to get a good position in that kingdom, and that desire is not bad...

They are just going about it all wrong...

So, they ask if they can sit on Jesus' right and left hand in that kingdom...

These would be places of honor reserved for important people in that kingdom...

And they thought they deserved them....

After all, they were most likely Jesus' cousins...

Jesus had just told Peter that there were rewards for following Him...

So, they have rush to the front of the line to ask for a good seat...

This is PRIDE 101...

These brothers and their mother are trying to climb the ladder of success by taking advantage of "Who You Know".

And the world often operates that way...

People push each other down to get around famous people or people of power...

Hoping that their face or their voice or their words will make an impression on that person that will lead to a future opportunity....

But Jesus is going that worldly approach to climbing the ladder of success upside down...

Look at Jesus' response in verse 38....

38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

Jesus' answer begins with a simple you don't know what you are asking for...

And then he challenges James and John with a few questions?

The first is can they drink from the same cup as Jesus.

In the Bible, sometimes cups are full of joy, and sometimes full of sorrow..

The cup that Jesus is talking about here is the cup of God's wrath that will be poured on Jesus as payment for the sins of all who will believe in Him.

And then he follows up that with a question about being baptized.

This is not a reference to baptism as it relates to salvation...

To baptize meant simply to be dipped or submerged..

And Jesus is asking James and John are they willing to be submerged in the suffering that he is going to face...

Though they must not have been listening too closely, Jesus had just talked about the suffering and persecution and death that was coming to Him.

In Mark 10:34, which is right before this scene, Jesus had just told the disciples...

That He was going to Jerusalem to be mocked, spit on, scourged, and then killed..

So the question here is very clear...

“James and John, do you want to drink that cup and be baptized in that suffering?”

Somewhat surprisingly, they reply this in verse 39...

39 They said to Him, “We are able.”

Though we may see this as an answer of our loyalty to Jesus...

This answer arises out of not knowing exactly what Jesus meant, and having a little too much confidence in their abilities..

And how do we know that?

Because when Jesus is being arrested, they all scatter...

It is similar to Peter who told Jesus, "If I have to die, I won't deny you. And then denies Him 3 times a short time later..

This is confidence in the flesh, and the flesh will fail you.

Though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak.

And this is a great lesson to us in placing our confidence wrong person.

You can't be trusted, but God can.

You can't do, but God can.

You can fail, but God can't.

Our confidence should not be placed in our own abilities, it must be placed in the Lord.

Whatever you are gifted at is a grace of God in your life, and he can very easily remove it if He so desires...

That is why every time we experience an ounce of success in our talents, every bit of the glory belongs to the Lord.

James and John had let their pride write checks where their flesh couldn't cash....

However, Jesus grants part of their request,...

Look at the end of verse 39...

And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized."

Jesus tells James and John that a cup of wrath and a baptism of suffering awaits them..

And guess what happens to James and John?

James becomes the first disciple to be killed for his faith.

Acts 12:1-2....

12 Now about that time ^[a]Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. ²And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

And though John escaped the sword, according to the book of Revelation, John was sent to live out his life on a deserted island alone because of his faith.

To their credit, they endured to the end like their Lord.

And though they didn't know what they were asking for, they got it in full measure...

However, Jesus stopped short of granting their first request...

Verse 40...

⁴⁰ But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

Even though each member of the trinity is God, each also has a role...

The Son was sent to die...

The Spirit was sent to help...

And in the case of assigning seats in the kingdom, the Father was assigned that role.

However, I think we can safely assume from this passage that those seats were assigned based upon our idea of greatness in this world...

The preacher with the greatest sermons won't be there..

The Bible scholar with the greatest knowledge won't be there...

In my mind, we can expect to see the ones who most suffered like Christ in this world to be there...

Greatest in the kingdom doesn't come from a great smile, perfect attendance or a good sermon, it comes when we give up our lives on earth and suffer like our Lord.

Will James and John be in those seats in the kingdom?

I don't know. Maybe...

Only the Father knows that....

Now, while James and John have been occupying Jesus, the other disciples have taken notice...

Verse 41...

41 Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with [o] James and John.

In school, I don't know if it was just because I was hungry or not, but those pizza rectangles that they served in the cafeteria were delicious...

One day, I was sitting with all my friends and this girl was sitting beside us that we really didn't know too well...

But she hadn't even touched her pizza....

But before I could get the words out, one of my buddies asked her, .. “Hey you mind if I have your pizza?”

But before she could answer, I said, “Dave, you don’t even know this girl... You shouldn’t be asking her for her pizza. That’s rude.”

Now, let’s be clear...

I didn’t care if he was rude.

I was said that because I was mad that he beat me in asking her for it...

And that is the case with the disciples in verse 41...

They are indignant because James and John are being rude and showing great pride in their request...

They are simply mad that they didn’t ask sooner...

And so Jesus is about to correct everyone’s thinking on greatness in verses 42-45...

This is called....

II. Greatness By Giving (42-45)

*⁴² Calling them to Himself, Jesus *said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.*

Jesus is the ultimate teacher....

Though he is surrounded by impatient and prideful disciples at times, he is gentle and continues to teach even though he has talked about this before....

And before we look at His lesson, I would remind us all that we need to be patient teachers as well...

Not everybody gets it all at the same time...

And yes, it may take multiple times before people understand....

Now, the balance to that is this...

There comes a time when it is time to either stay on or get off the bus...

There comes a time when people are expected to learn and obey...

Eventually, Jesus sent these men out in the world to sink or swim...

And the same choice eventually comes to all of us....

The wisdom is to know when that time is as a teacher and to be patient and gentle until that time comes...

On this day, Jesus chooses to be patient and instruct when it comes to the pride that he sees in the disciples...

And he begins his instruction on how to be great by offering an example of what not to do...

For an example of that, he turns to the world's idea of how to be great and honored...

And that is seen in how the nations lord over their people...

This is yet another example of Greatness Grabbed...

Where men rise to power in sinful ways, and then use that power to gain more power until the world sees them as great men.

The Gentiles, which is another word for the nations, grabbed greatness by force and persuasion....

The same way that James and John and their mother wanted to get greatness....

By persuasion and family connections....

But Jesus corrects that worldly idea beginning in verse 43...

⁴³ But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.

This is the defining characteristic of Christianity...

Greatness in Christianity comes by giving of yourself....

Denying yourself.

Laying down your life.

Taking up a cross..

Serving others.

Forgiving others..

Thinking more of others than you do of yourself..

These are the foundational blocks of what it means to be a Christian....

Now, the world teaches just the opposite...

Don't deny yourself, enjoy all the sin life has to offer...

Don't give up our life.... Embrace your life and please yourself...

We even have pastors teaching that you should seek your best life now...

I assure you, the reason we need to not seek the best life now is because the Bible teaches that the best life is yet to come...

The world teaches don't take up a cross..

Instead, it teaches to compromise your beliefs is suffering or persecution comes your way...

The world doesn't teach us to serve others...

It teaches us to serve us, and make us happy...

The world doesn't teach us to think more of others than we do ourselves...

Instead, the world teaches self-esteem to 4 year olds and it is a major part of worldly psychology...

Where we are taught that we must love ourself before we can love anyone else...

And so many Christians fall into those worldly traps..

And even offer that Satanic advice to others....

The defining characteristics of Christianity are right here in the words of Jesus himself...

You want to be great in the kingdom of God?

Then be a servant and a slave in this world...

Don't seek your own interests, seek the interests of others...

Don't compromise your belief because of persecution...

Rather, stand firm and endure suffering.

Don't have a high view of yourself...

Have a low view of yourself and a high view of Jesus Christ...

You don't need more self-esteem, you need more Savior Esteem....

Where you have a high view of Jesus Christ and you seek to please Him in all you do....

Jesus is clearly teaching the disciples and us that greatness is not a power grab...

But it is a rush to give up all your power and serve the Lord and others...

We live in a world of "rights"

I have the right to be happy.

I have the right not to be wronged by someone else..

I have the right to do what I want...

They only thing that anyone deserves in the world is to die and go to hell for the sins they have committed against a holy God....

If you want to call that a right...

Then we all have the right to eternal punishment for our sin....

That is our only right in this world....

Do your what Jesus is teaching us here?

Lay down your rights....

Stop demanding what you think you deserve...

Fall on the mercy of God found in Jesus Christ...

Then pick up a cross and follow him with your whole life...

And become great in the only kingdom that matters by serving the Lord and others...

And before think this is me preaching it up a little bit and trying to tell you how to live...

You can find your example of this kind of lifestyle in none other than the Lord Jesus Christ..

Verse 45...

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His ^[p]life a ransom for many."

Was Jesus' life the example of constantly sitting around and calling on others to serve Him?

Was Jesus' life an example of stepping on others to make his way to the top?

Was Jesus' life an example of someone seeking more self-esteem and demanding his rights?

NO!

Jesus came and gave no thought to his own comforts..

Jesus came and saw others needs more important than his own.

Jesus came and served others in the greatest way imaginable...

But giving up his life in the place of guilty sinners.

The cross was payment to God for the sins of all those who believe in Him.

No, the incredible twist behind all this is that Jesus could have come to earth and demanded others to serve Him...

And as God, he would have been the only one ever justified in doing that...

He could have claimed his right to be happy...

But instead he showed his holiness...

He could have claimed his right to never be wronged...

But instead...HE was wronged all the way to the point of death even though he was completely innocent...

The example we have in Christianity to follow is the example of Christ...

A man who didn't demand his rights be honored...

But instead laid all his rights down so that we could be forgiven....

IF he did that for us, how important is it to lay our rights down to serve Him...

The next your mouth opens and you demand your right to be treated fairly...

Remember that your Lord was treated unfairly so that you could be saved...

And remember if you really want to be treated fairly, that means you have to die for your own sins...

And I don't think any of us desire that kind of fairness...

Instead, let us seek the mercy of God found at the cross of Jesus Christ, where he paid a ransom that none of us can afford....

Conclusion

Remember those ships that collided in the Black sea in 1986...

The investigation concluded that the collision occurred because both captains refused to turn out of the way...

That is what pride will do to a ship captain...

He will hold the wheel straight even if it means crashing into another ship and people dying..

That same pride will also cause you to hold your course in life even if it means you will die in your sins...

To turn that ship meant that you were a weaker man, and on that day in 1986, neither captain wanted to admit weakness...

Let me tell you something this morning as we leave....

You are a weaker man or woman this morning when you compare yourself to a holy God...

And he is commanding you even this morning to turn that ship by repenting of your sins and trusting in His Son with your life....

Don't be a prideful and stubborn captain this morning, repent and change course....

Avoid the collision that is ahead....

Then live your Christian life trying to be great in the kingdom by losing your pride and serving others...

That is the road to greatness in God's eyes...

And that road is before you this morning...

Let us pray..