

Meet the King

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[0 : 00] Mark 9, starting in verse 30. They went on from there and passed through Galilee, and he did not want anyone to know, 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. But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. And when they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house, he asked them, What were you discussing on the way?

But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down, and he called the twelve, and he said to them, If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.

And he took a child and put him in the midst of them. And taking him in his arms, he said to them, Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. And whoever receives me receives not me, but him who sent me.

John said to him, Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he is not following us. But Jesus said, Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

[1 : 19] For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.

It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.

[2 : 29] Let's pray. Loving Father, as we come to your word today in Mark, please help us to listen carefully to what you have to say to us through it.

Help me to speak clearly and we pray that your truth is clear. In Jesus' name, amen. Do you want to be great?

Have you ever thought about what the history books might say about you? I mean, wouldn't it be amazing to be listed alongside people like Queen Elizabeth II, Nikola Tesla, George Washington, maybe Alexander the Great?

I mean, greatness is in the name, isn't it? Maybe you're not that ambitious, but you'd like to be well thought of at work. You long for that promotion.

You want to earn enough money to be comfortable. I mean, it's a natural human instinct to want to be great, isn't it? In his book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which I'm sure a lot of you have heard of, Dale Carnegie says, there is one longing, almost as deep, almost as imperious, as the desire for food or sleep, which is seldom gratified.

[3 : 45] It is what food calls the desire to be great, and it is what Jewy calls the desire to be important. So what does it mean to be great? And what would it look like to chase greatness?

Well, the disciples have the same questions and aspirations, and interestingly, Jesus stops far short of telling them not to desire greatness. But the surprising thing about his response is how he says

one is to be great.

See, worldly greatness is selfish. It seeks to elevate oneself above others, to be great at their expense, to rule and dominate over others, and to exclude.

It doesn't recognize that greatness can, in fact, be shared. But in this passage, we'll see that the way of the kingdom is selfless and open. Jesus turns the disciples' ideas about how to be great, upside down.

We're in Mark chapter 9 today, which is the second half of the book. So remember, Mark has two main sections. Chapters 1 to 8 ask the question, who is Jesus?

[4 : 59] In chapters 9 to 16, why did he come, and what does it mean to follow him? So our passage today is mostly concerned with that last question. And having seen that Jesus is the Christ, as Peter stated in chapter 8, verse 29, Jesus then explains that he must suffer and die, and three days later be raised.

That's the why did he come. And what does it mean to follow him? Well, let's jump in and explore this idea of greatness. And what does it mean to be great in the kingdom of God?

What does it mean to follow the king? The disciples have just seen Jesus cast out a demon, one that they couldn't cast out, and on the road from there, Jesus has been telling them how he, as the son of man, the esteemed authority, Christ, king figure from the Old Testament, will be delivered into the hands of men and be killed, and three days later rise again.

And now in our passage, we see them arrive at Capernaum, but while Jesus had been explaining his looming death to them, what were they discussing? Which of them is the greatest?

Rather than discussing how the promised king who's right there in front of them, whom Peter has openly confessed as the Christ, whom Peter, James, and John witnessed in shining glory in his transfiguration, whose power over sickness, sin, and Satan they've seen displayed so many times, rather than discussing that he has just told them for a second time that he must suffer and die, they argue about who is the greatest.

[6 : 41] It's just completely missing the point, isn't it? They don't understand that their king must die. They know Jesus is the king, but they don't recognize what that means.

They want to be great in the kingdom, and they probably feel pretty good, pretty proud to be following the Christ, which we'll see a bit more in the next section, and why shouldn't they?

Why shouldn't they aspire to be great? What's wrong with it? Well, it's not that they want to be great, but how they're trying to achieve it. They're arguing, they're trying to be better than each other.

They don't see that they can all be great together, and they're ignoring the greatest one, the king, and that he must die. If they want to be great, what does that mean for them?

Jesus the king redefines their idea of greatness. I mean, who is the greatest in a kingdom? Is it not the king? The king is the one in control.

[7 : 45] The king leads his people. The king deals out judgment. The king is the one to whom other kings pay tribute, as we've just seen in One Kings with Solomon.

So in the kingdom of God, who is the greatest? Well, it's Jesus, the king. So how do you become great in the kingdom?

Well, look at the king and see what he does, and what he says about being great. And what does he say? If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.

Then he demonstrates. He takes a child who in the ancient world had no significance, no rights, no social standing. I mean, we esteem children in our culture, but that's thanks to the influence that the gospel has had on the West.

In the ancient world, children would be cast aside and sold as slaves if they weren't wanted. They were the lowest in society. But Jesus takes a child and places him in the midst of the group, and you might expect him to say, see this little child, be like him.

[8 : 57] No, he says, what does he say? Have a look at verse 36 and 37. And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives not me, but him who sent me.

He says, receive the child, not be like the child, be like Jesus, the king, who receives the child into his arms. This is completely opposite to what the disciples are expecting, isn't it?

They want to be great, but they're self-ambitious. Jesus says, no, receive the child, be servant of all like him. receive the child in my name, he says.

So not for the sake of wanting to be great, not solely for the sake of doing what Jesus says, not even for the sake of serving the child, but to serve and honor Jesus, and so receive him.

deny yourself ambition, humble yourself to one who would be lower than a child, to serve even a child. And in doing so, you serve and honor Jesus, the king, and the father who sent him.

[10:17] It brings us back to chapter 8, doesn't it? Do you remember just after Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus explains that he must suffer and die, and that those who would follow him would do the same, must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him.

Chapter 8, verse 34, it says, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

Jesus calls us, his followers, to come and die. This whole passage is about this, about denying yourself and taking up your cross, about dying to yourself.

Jesus says, You want to be great? Then deny yourself. Take up your cross. Deny yourself ambitions.

Be the least. Be a servant of all, even of little children. Deny yourself ambition. Deny your pride. Which brings us to the next section, which is about pride and exclusivity.

[11:34] The disciples are proud. Right. They're proud to be following Jesus, the Christ himself, and shouldn't they be? Yes, of course. But what's their error? They're exclusive.

In their arrogance, they think that they're the only ones following Jesus or the only ones doing it properly. After all, they're physically with Jesus, right? They're following him around and he's teaching them privately.

And what's ironic about this whole scene is just that just a few verses ago, they weren't able to cast out a demon. But where they failed, the man in this passage is succeeding.

So how can he be casting out demons? Well, John himself says, it's in Jesus' name. He's not claiming to have authority of himself, but he's trusting in Jesus who has bound the strong man, Satan.

And Jesus says, don't stop him. He can't exactly be going around casting out demons in Jesus' name and then turn around and start slandering Jesus and saying anything evil or negative about him, can he?

[12:43] That would be self-sabotaging at the very least. And what he says, and what Jesus says next is striking, isn't it? For the one who is not against us is for us.

What questions jump into your mind there? All right, well, what does it mean about apathetic people or Hindus who say that there are multiple paths to God?

I've met many people on Walk Up who have said to me, well, good for you. You can follow Jesus. There's nothing wrong with that, but I don't believe in him. What about them?

Are they for us by Jesus' logic? Well, no, he's not saying that. Jesus is implying that there are two groups of people, two kinds of people in the world, those who are for him and those who are against him.

So everyone who isn't against him is for him. That's true. And in Matthew 12, verse 30, he says, whoever is not with me is against me. And since this man is doing this mighty work in his name, Jesus says he can't be against them.

[13:54] He won't be able to speak against them, therefore he is for them. But what about the apathetic person? Well, in their ignorance, in their apathy, in their rejection of Jesus' supreme kingship, they are actually against him, aren't they?

Because they don't honour Jesus as king, the only king. They reject him and are therefore against him. And of course, that's what the Bible calls sin, a fundamental rejection of God, rejection of Jesus as king.

This man isn't doing that. He's upholding Jesus as the authority by which he casts out the demons. But the disciples don't see how he can be great as well as them.

They think that they're the best, that they're the greatest, because they're with Jesus. Jesus is speaking against tribalism in that sense. And he takes it one step further to say, for truly I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

The key words here are because you belong to Christ. I mean, what's the reason they're receiving you? Not to be great themselves or simply to help you out. Plenty of people do that.

[15 : 11] But because you belong to Christ. Like Jesus' example in the previous section, in receiving and serving others because they belong to Christ, they receive him and the Father who sent him.

So now we come to one of the most brutal and graphic parts of the New Testament. Jesus has already turned his disciples' ideas about greatness upside down, telling them to die to their ambitions and serve even little children and to die to their pride.

Whoever isn't against them is for them. But now he doesn't pull any punches in telling them to die to sin. In fact, if what he suggests here is done literally, then it would result in literal death, wouldn't it? So first of all, he has a very severe warning for anyone who would cause sin in anyone who believes in him. It's a would you rather.

Would you rather cause a follower of Jesus to sin or be dropped into the sea with a great millstone tied around your neck, drowning guaranteed? He says, the latter is better.

[16 : 23] This section is about judgment, the severe and righteous judgment that those who sin and cause others to sin deserve. Preventing sin in others also means being brutal about the sin in your own life.

If you've been around church for a while, then maybe this whole cutting off limbs to avoid hell section is a bit too familiar. Maybe you've heard it all before and it doesn't really shock you anymore.

I think that was true for me as I was reading this. But if you're new to church, maybe this is the first time you've heard Jesus tells people to cut off their limbs and tear out their eyes and that's shocking.

Well, that's good. It's supposed to be shocking. Friends, sin is extremely serious. Hell is more terrible than you could imagine.

There are no stronger words than what Jesus says here to remind us of that. If the gruesomeness of this has been lost to you, then let me rekindle it by using an example.

[17 : 31] In 2007, a farmer from South Carolina named Samson Parker amputated his own arm to save himself. Here's his story according to an interview with the Today Show in the US.

Parker had been harvesting corn that day when some stalks got stuck in the set of rollers that shucked the cut corn. He reached in the still-running machine to pull the stalks out and the rollers grabbed first his glove and then his hand.

He tried yelling for help but there was no one near the isolated field. So for more than an hour he tried to pull his hand free only to have it pulled even further into the machinery.

He was able to reach an iron bar and jam it into a chain and sprocket that drove the rollers and with his fingers growing numb he pulled out a small pocket knife and started to cut his own fingers off to free himself.

Before he could do that the sprocket grinding against the rod he jammed in threw off sparks and that set the ground litter on fire. That's when Parker knew he had to cut off the arm or die right there.

[18 : 44] My skin was melting it was dripping off my arm like melting plastic. I told myself I'm not going to die here. I kept fighting kept praying. He said he felt little when he was cutting off cutting through his own flesh.

Really the only pain that I felt was when I felt the nerves. I could feel the nerves as I was cutting my arm off there. When he got down to the bone he dropped onto the ground using the force of his own weight to break the bone and free him from the machine.

As he got up a tyre exploded on the corn picker and the force of it threw him back about five feet and free of the flames. That's a true story.

He later received treatment and recovered however missing his right arm below the elbow. That's shocking isn't it? It's gruesome.

It's brutal. In all honesty I felt uncomfortable writing that and reading it and even telling it now. But that's exactly the response Jesus is trying to evoke.

[19 : 48] What would you do in that situation? Samson's choice was cut off his arm or die in the fire. Jesus says hell is so severe and so serious you should do whatever it takes to avoid it.

What needs to happen to avoid hell? Well it's avoiding sin. Sin would mean you get thrown into hell. How do you avoid sin?

At any cost. Even the cost of your own limbs. Jesus says it is better to be crippled to be lame to have one eye than to be thrown into hell where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

And here he is quoting from Isaiah from the very last verse of Isaiah chapter 66 verse 24. And Isaiah is all about God's judgment on his people how because of their sin he will utterly destroy them but that through that judgment from the stump that remains he will fulfill his promises and restore the true Israel.

the book of Isaiah ends with God himself arriving and bringing judgment and saving his people from all nations. So come with me to Isaiah chapter 66 starting in verse 15.

[21 : 22] For behold the Lord will come in fire and his chariots like the whirlwind to render his anger and fury and his rebuke with flames of fire for by fire will the Lord enter into judgment and by his sword with all flesh and those slain by the Lord shall be many.

Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens following one in the midst eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice shall come to an end together declares the Lord.

for I know their works and their thoughts and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues and they shall come and shall see my glory and I will set a sign among them and from them I will send survivors to the nations to Tarshish Pol and Ludd who draw the bow to Tubal and Javan to the coastlands far away that have not heard my fame or seen my glory and they shall declare my glory among the nations and they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the Lord on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries sorry to my holy man in Jerusalem says the Lord just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord and some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites says the Lord for as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me says the Lord so shall your offspring and your name remain from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh shall come to worship before me declares the Lord 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 in abhorrence to all flesh so God's judgment is final there are only two groups the survivors and the slain this is what Jesus is quoting he's saying avoid this at all costs don't even value your limbs above escaping this judgment but the question remains how does cutting off limbs actually help is it any help at all why don't we see

Jesus' disciples doing it now imagine with me for a moment you realise your right hand is causing you to sin so you cut it off at the elbow but then you realise your left hand is causing you to sin so you cut it off too now your legs are causing you to sin you cut them off your eyes cause you to sin tear them out how far can you go like will you ever be free of sin or will sin always find a way what truly causes you to sin well Jesus has already told us in Mark hasn't he back in Mark chapter 7 verse 20 to 23 Jesus says it's the heart and he said whatever comes out of a person is what defiles him for from within out of the heart of man come evil thoughts sexual immorality theft murder adultery coveting wickedness deceit sensuality envy slander pride foolishness all these evil things come from within and they defile a person so the real problem is the heart not just the organ that pumps blood around your body no it's the very essence of who you are your innermost being now we should be thinking as we read

Mark 9 well if I could cut out the root of my sin my heart well that would solve it wouldn't it since that's where all this sin comes from but how can I cut out my heart how can I cut out my innermost being well if you did if you followed this through to where it naturally leads what does it mean means to die to die to yourself your innermost self completely if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me for whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it how do you save your life when faced with hell and judgment what hope is there Jesus says deny yourself die to yourself follow after him just as he is going to the cross so go rather than being selfish in ambition seeking to be the greatest over others rather than being proud and turning away those who aren't in your group rather than seeking self preservation deny all of it follow Jesus trust him he has made a way he is the one who delivers us from the wrath to come only by following him not our sin not our ambitions or our pride only through him can we be delivered so that brings us to verse 49 and 50 in this little section about salt and peace and what's going on with verse 49 for everyone will be salted with fire well remember

[27 : 03] Jesus has just quoted the last verse of Isaiah and in Isaiah 66 fire is God's judgment and throughout Isaiah God is promising judgment on the people for rebelling against him he will judge them but he will also save a remnant out of it have a look with me at Isaiah chapter 1 verse 24 and 26 and this is just after God has described the sin of Jerusalem as an unfaithful wife therefore the Lord declares the Lord of hosts the mighty one of Israel ah I will get revenge from my enemies and avenge myself on my foes I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy and I will restore your judges as at the first and your counsellors as at the beginning afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness the faithful city so through judgment

God will restore and save his faithful city the true Jerusalem salt was used in sacrifices as well to purify preserve and to symbolize God's covenant with Israel so here in Mark chapter 9 two illustrations are being used that through judgment God is bringing about his salvation he is purifying his people for himself and the image of salt includes that purification and the preservation through judgment and the symbol of God's faithfulness to his promises salt is good but if the salt has lost its saltiness how will you make it salty again that's an oxymoron right how can salt be unsalty it's not possible it wouldn't be called salt anymore but having been purified by Jesus who is the remnant of Israel and who by clinging to we have deliverance the one who restores our sinful hearts who changes us completely having been purified through the judgment have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another directly contrasting from the opening scene where the disciples were arguing with one another now because they have been redeemed through Jesus purified through judgment they can now pursue greatness but not by arguing and scrambling over each other as the world does instead by being at peace with one another by having this purification in them and having peace in everything in serving others in including all who call on Jesus name and in keeping one another from sin do you want to be great the disciples wanted that but something they failed to see was they already were they had been called into the kingdom of God saved and delivered from the judgment they had Jesus teaching them and he had called them to serve others to follow him and deny themselves they failed to see that they were already great they didn't need to argue and push each other down but they also failed to see that the greatest one the king was to suffer and die and that being great in the kingdom meant to follow him to die to themselves completely so what about you do you want to be great Jesus says come and die follow him trust in him be at peace with one another love and serve each other welcome in everyone who is for Jesus be on guard against sin trust him who has purified us and delivered us from the coming judgment let's pray loving father thank you that you sent Jesus the king thank you that you sent him to suffer and die and be raised again to be king forever please help us as we seek to follow him to die to ourselves to give up our selfish ambitions and our pride and our sin help us to trust in Jesus who can cut it out of us who has saved us from the judgment help us to trust in him and follow him completely in Jesus name Amen