

“True Greatness”

Mark 9:30-50

Introduction

➤ Have you ever done something, or said something at a really inappropriate time I remember when I first started here on staff, the first time, not 2.5 years but in 1998 as Scott Cunningham’s assistant – we were doing one of our Summer beach Bible studies and the water was so cold, so I was in the water with Scott just freezing – but we had just done a summer camp baptism so there was only like 2 high school kids getting baptized

- Pastor Rob on the other hand had a line of like 20 people he was baptizing – so we just stood there half in the water, really cold

Well on the beach was Evan Wickham, a brand new intern working with Jr. High ministry and he was looking at Scott and I and we could see him making fun of us – “oh are you guys cold, I’m not, I’m warm all in my clothes” – so I looked at Scott and said, “Evan needs to get re-baptized this afternoon” – Scott loves stuff like that – so we calmly left the water, me walking to the left, Scott to the right and like two wolves hunting together we descended upon our pray

- We grabbed him, fully clothed, screaming and crying like a little girl all the way down into the water and just repeatedly “baptized” him, over and over again, holding him under making sure all of his sins were washed away

Yeah Very funny!!! – however suddenly Scott grabs me by the shoulder and stops me, you see he had caught the eye of Pastor Rob who remember was trying to have a deep spiritual moment with a line of about 20 people, all while his two High school pastors were screaming, “Halleluiah Jesus”

Totally inappropriate as we found out later that afternoon

- Apparently dunking Evan repeatedly and holding him under that water is not appropriate behavior during a baptism – crazy!!!

Well I bring up that story because the disciples start out our study this morning doing something totally inappropriate

- as we already read, Jesus is pouring out His heart to His disciples about His death
 - these are His disciples, His men, His followers, His friends, His family
 - Jesus is bearing His soul – a really heavy, raw moment

And what are His disciples doing???

- they are arguing over who is the greatest
 - Jesus is pouring out His heart and the disciples are bickering like little children

I was just on a speaking trip last week to 3 different cities, so there were many plane flights in Chicago, there was this Mom who looked lost trying to find her gate and her children who had to be like 6 and 5 are rolling little kid suitcases, but the little girl would kick her brother’s suitcase and flip it over and he would run and hit her to stop it – then Mom would punish, you stop that, they would walk ten more feet and the little girl would kick her brothers suitcase and he would turn and start swinging, stop it!!!

- This is the disciples, Peter would say, “I’m the greatest John, you know I am” – “you are not – Jesus just called you Satan the other day – I’m the greatest” – no, He called you and your brother James the sons of Thunder when you wanted to call down fire on those people in Samaria” – Well at least we know we are greater than the other 9, we got to see Jesus transfigured – what??? - I’m the greatest – no I’m the greatest, as they were taking swings at each other

And I love it, after pouring out His heart, they get back to home base in Capernaum and Jesus says, “Hey guys, what were you talking about on the road back there???”

- Ah you mean when you were talking about you dying? Yeah then??? – Ah nothing!!!!

But Jesus had heard every word, even though He wasn’t within ear shot, He had seen their hearts

- so it was time for a staff meeting
 - I find it so interesting that Jesus doesn’t rebuke them – and to me that was not because Jesus was shy to rebuke – He rebuked them all the time
 - No, I don’t think he rebuked them because I think God puts something in all of us that wants to leave a mark, that makes a person want to change his or her culture – its okay to want to be great
- But it’s the motivation and the means that is key
 - it’s the motivation of why we want to become great and whose name we want to be great and the means which we accomplish that, that can either make our desire to be great either Christ like or extremely sinful

So Jesus is going to have a little staff meeting, where the God of the Universe is going to explain to them what real greatness is

- and this is so important for us today as well
 - because its not just the disciples that were mistaken on what real greatness is
 - our culture is out to lunch on this subject as well.

We live in a culture where people’s names are great for the wrong reason and by the wrong means

- People aren’t famous so much so today because they have accomplished any great thing, they haven’t added something to the world, like inventing the light bulb or the i-phone but people today are famous simply for being famous – I mean tell me something the Kardashians have accomplished, I’m not trying to be mean but tell me something, anything – not their dead father, but something they have added to this world? – anyone, anyone?

And with the onslaught of reality TV, you get famous by being crazy, by jumping off a building, by hitting yourself with a bat

- I mean who wants to watch a show about Pastor Jason who comes home and loves his family, is faithful to his wife, pays his bills - this Thursday Night at 8 on True TV– no one wants to see that!!!
 - but if the advertisement said, “Pastor Jason comes home and loves his family, is faithful to his wife, pays his bills and secretly kidnaps and then eats his neighbors”, sorry Rob Nash, he’s my neighbor – now everybody would be tuning in – because that’s crazy - so we have to be crazy to be great, to be famous

But Jesus knows the truth is far different

- so he is going to share 4 principals of true greatness with his disciples and I pray that you pray these in and work them out in your life
 - because it’s okay to want to be great
 - to want to change your culture for the better

- but what makes you great for eternity is far different than what makes you great in this world – so listen up.

True Greatness???

#1 – Receive everyone – Mark 9:35-37

- the first thing Jesus did to teach this really important truth to His disciples was use an illustration they all could relate to
 - Jesus takes a little child and sets that little child in the midst of them
- Now remember this staff meeting is taking place in Peter's house in Capernaum, this very well could have been Peter's son – we don't know
 - But what we do know is in that society, kind of like in our society, children were seen as unimportant to most people
 - But Jesus uses this little child as a living illustration – if you want to be great, you need to receive everyone, not just those who are little in age, but little in status, in wealth, in popularity – that is true greatness
 - To receive people who will do nothing for your status, like a little child

You know as human beings we love to name drop – I'll admit - I do, - you know maybe you have heard, when I was in high school I finished second in the California State High School Golf championship to a now well know professional golfer, maybe you have heard of him – Tiger Woods – the rumor I hear every year or so is that I beat him, but the truth is I was 0-30 in my junior career against him, but I have played golf with him, many times – I finished second all the time to a famous guy

- maybe you have heard that my roommate in Bible college and even for a few years after Bible college was Jeremy Camp, the famous Christian musician – Millions of albums sold – We still hang out, got his cell # right here.. Let me drop big important names so you'll think I'm important

Most of us if we can will do that all the time

- But you will never hear someone say – Did you know I was talking to Zeke Robinson the other day, Zeke who???
- Zeke Robinson – and last week Desiree Hernandez was at my house – can you believe it!!!
- Desiree who, Zeke who???
- Oh you don't know them – well they are real people, they are my kids friends from children's ministry, and I think they are awesome
 - But I don't throw their names around or brag that they have been in my car
 - Because they don't do anything for my social status, they are just great kids

And we sometimes have this tendency to have time for important people, people who can advance my career, people who can help me climb up the social status ladder, but if you are not going to increase my bottom line, if you are not going to advance my cause, “who are you and I don't have time for you”

- And though that is common in the world today, in Jesus' eyes that attitude is anything but greatness

Because Jesus cares about them, Jesus died for them

- Jesus cares what little Zeke is going through
 - Jesus died for Desiree's sin
 - Jesus cares about those who 10% of their salary is nothing because they have no salary
 - Just as He cares for those who are movers and shakers

- Jesus cares for that guy or that girl who is a little strange at work, or at your school as much as He loves the top salesman's or the quarterback

And when I stop only receiving and having time for those who can help me advance, help my status

- but I take time for the lowly, and the leper of my sphere of influence as Jesus did for the lepers of His
 - Jesus says, that is real greatness

James wrote to the early church and said...

“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” – James 2:1-4*

- Apparently this was happening in the early church
 - A guy would come in with gold chains around his neck, the first century Mr. T – and they would say, welcome, sit up front next to the tithe box
 - But some homeless guy would come in smelling funny and they would make him sit on the ground in the back
 - That is horrible – that is such the opposite of the heart of Christ, and it is the opposite of true greatness
- True greatness puts all that flesh aside and just receives who God puts in front of us everyday and in every situation – whether great or small – whether powerful or not – whether they will ever benefit you at all
 - That is real greatness

True Greatness???

#1 – Receive everyone – Mark 9:36-37

#2 – Be gracious – Mark 9:38-41

- After the illustration of receiving those who are like children, who can't really advance your thing, whatever that is
 - John then pipes up, I guess thinking he had done something great
 - But again, when you understand what He is saying, you just have to wonder about these cats
- John comes to Jesus in verse 38 and says, Jesus there was someone setting people free from demons but the person who was setting people free from the power of Satan in their lives, I told him to stop it
 - To stop setting people free from the power of Satan
 - Yeah – stop right away
- Who are these guys

We think of Peter, James and John as Jesus' elite group, the inner circle, the pillars of the early church

- But I just wonder if they were always with Jesus because they were the special disciples who needed Jesus to be with them all the time, He couldn't leave them alone
 - I mean Peter is always saying dumb things, James and John want to set the Samaritans on fire and now this

- I told them to stop setting people free from Evil
- What????

It is so amazing to me that whoever this other person was, they were not a disciple, did not really understand everything about Jesus, but used His name for great things, to set people free from demons – that is so ironic in light of the powerlessness that the disciples had just experienced

Maybe they were a little jealous

- it is amazing to me when someone is blessed a little more than we are with position or money or looks or popularity
 - we have this sinful tendency to try to tear them down
 - oh that ministry over there that has so many people – it is because they are fluffy, they don't really preach the Word
- or that guy that has all that money, I bet he has shady business practices

And again this attitude is common, it happens all the time, but that doesn't make it right and Jesus says it is the opposite of true greatness

- true greatness is being gracious to people, especially people who are different than us, that do things differently, that have different gifts that we have, that God forbid are a little more Pentecostal than us or more traditional than us
 - or that is not real church – what????
- If we don't change that attitude, we will miss so many opportunities to minister to people
 - Oh you are different than me – you have more money than I do, less money than I do, you look different, you, oh, go to a different church
 - Oh let's drop that sinfulness men and women who name the name of Jesus

I just got back from a trip where I spoke to the staff at this really large church.

Would you like to know which one? -- I love to name drop

- no, I won't, but to be honest - this pastor was different than me
 - He looks a lot different
 - his church is way different than this one
 - his philosophy of ministry is way different

I mean to illustrate, this church is huge, and so I asked him what the most effective advice he could give me in reaching this culture, and he took one look at me and said, you have to change the way you dress bro

- you need some skinny jeans and black rimmed glasses that you don't really need
 - He said, "if you look like the culture, you will reach the culture"
 - that is a different philosophy of ministry
- I actually started picturing pastor Chuck back in the hippie days of Calvary Chapel, dropping the suit and started showing up in Tie-dye and bell bottoms and I just couldn't stop laughing
 - Skinny jeans – I got skinny jeans
 - Every pair of jeans I own are skinny jeans, because I need to drop a few pounds, so all my jeans are tight – I don't think that is the answer

The ministry was really different

- but instead of focusing and being critical on minor issues that don't matter a hill of beans in eternity

I realized right away, these guys love Jesus

- these guys are passionate to reach their city for Jesus

- and God you have opened up this crazy door for a representative of Calvary Chapel Vista to share with their staff and spend a day with their pastor, a door I have no business being invited into
- but God I want to use this opportunity not to major on the minors, but to just talk about your Word and your Spirit

Because you see I know that if that church with every advantage grabs a hold of the fact that God's Word says, "Its not by might, and not by power and not by skinny jeans, but by my Spirit says the Lord"

If that church that already has money and facilities and talent and influence, if that church grabs a hold of the fact that the real secret is not black rimmed glasses but its the Word of God taught by men filled with the Spirit of God, that church will turn the world upside

- but they would never have heard me on that if I focused on all of our minor theological and philosophical difference
 - and I really believe that is what Jesus is saying

"For he who is not against us is on our side." – Mark 9:40

- look we have a real enemy and its not the church down the street or the pastor with different spiritual gifts
 - and it's not your wife or your husband or your friend who you are bitter at the moment
- You have a real enemy who wants to steal, kill and destroy
 - And he wins the war in your life through your pride and your jealousy and your bitterness
- And maybe if we could get past those things church – maybe instead of shooting one another all the time, we would shoot our own selfishness, our own blind ambition and we would put to death our own pride
 - and maybe instead of being so wrap up in always needing to be first and always needing to be right and needing to be justified, maybe, just maybe if we actually put those things aside, we could accomplish something great in this life?
 - Because real greatness receives everyone, whether or not they can advance you
 - Real greatness is being gracious especially to those who are different than you
 - Thirdly..

True Greatness???

#1 – Receive everyone – Mark 9:36-37

#2 – Be gracious – Mark 9:38-41

#3 – Don't stumble people – Mark 9:42

- What does it mean to stumble someone, we are not talking about putting your leg out when an old lady walks by
 - But that is bad too, don't do that – that's not greatness
 - But to cause someone to stumble means to cause them to sin

And Jesus is very serious about this and He uses an illustration that is very graphic, very scary and I think it was employed to drive home the point

- having a millstone hung around your neck and tossed in the sea was an actual punishment used on occasion by the Romans

- Joseph a Jewish historian who worked for the Roman empire records that an early Jewish rebel by the name of Judah the Galilean lived just before the ministry of Christ – he and many followers of his rebelled against Rome and as punishment, he and many of his rebellious party had giant millstones tied around their neck and were tossed off shore and drowned
- This would have happened when Jesus and His disciples were teenagers, the image would have stuck in their mind
- And Jesus is saying, this is how serious I am that your life doesn't cause others to stumble, to sin
 - Sounds serious - So how do we avoid this??

Well one way is to not do the opposite of this sermon

- if we treat people who are not as cool as us, as wealthy as us with contempt and that drives them away from the church and the Lord – God forbid

If we are not gracious with people that are different than us and that causes them not to hear the truth of God's word

- then woe unto us
 - and Paul also says in I Corinthians 8

“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” – I Corinthians 8:9-13

- Paul says I can also stumble people by misusing my liberties
 - In Paul's day the issue was meat sacrificed to idols – because the meat had two purposes, being used to worship an idol and then sold in the meat market – you could get a good price on that meat
 - And I don't mean to offend, this was a dilemma for a good Jew
- Because they knew idol worship was bad, don't have anything to do with that, but I like a good deal on a steak too
 - What do I do?

Well Paul says, look I know an idol is nothing, it's not really a god, so I have no problem with it – that is called a liberty, something we know because of our maturity in Christ we have the right to do – God isn't mad at us for it

For me, I have prayed and prayed and I feel like I have the liberty to watch sports, and I do watch a lot of sports

- some just think that is so awful, but between me and the Lord, we have no problem
 - He is also a Dodger fan, so its okay

But Paul's caveat to liberty is, if my liberty causes my brother to stumble, I choose not to exercise my liberty

- in Paul's case he says, I know meat sacrificed to idols is nothing, but if my brother whose conscience is sensitive to that sees me eat that, and then he feels it is okay for him to eat it, violating his conscience
 - I am not walking in love
 - So I would rather never eat meat again, Paul says, - man that is love Paul!!!!
 - That is greatness!!!!

We have other issues in our day

- liberties that you are convinced are okay between you and God
 - and that is fine as long as they really are liberties and not sin
 - none of you have the liberty to steal, to commit adultery, to be drunk – those are not liberties you and Jesus have prayed about – those are sins and they need to be repented of

But if we really want greatness? – if you want to be mediocre, then just do what you are doing!

- but if you want to be great – we need to pray – Lord is something I consider a liberty, does it have the potential to stumble
 - then I want that gone from my life
 - Jesus says that perspective is true greatness
 - One more and we will be done

True Greatness???

#1 – Receive everyone – Mark 9:36-37

#2 – Be gracious – Mark 9:38-41

#3 – Don't stumble people – Mark 9:42

#4 – Deal radically with your sin – Mark 9:43-50

Greatness is dealing radically with your own sin

- and see the contrast
 - with others I am to be gracious, I am not to be looking for things that are wrong with other people, I am not to be a sin sniffer
- But with myself – if I am going to be great, I need to deal radically with my sin

Now please remember Jesus is not talking about salvation

- He is not saying, if you want to be really saved you need to deal radically with your sin
 - No – the issue is greatness, not salvation
 - Some people really get off track with this stuff
- But He is saying we need to deal radically with our sin

Now I don't believe Jesus is telling us to hack off parts of your body

- there have been believers in church history that have done that
 - Origen of Alexandria, had himself castrated to overcome lust
 - Bummer was he wrote latter it didn't fix the problem in his heart
 - That would be a bummer one to figure out too late – oh the problem is my heart – so I didn't have too...

No, I don't believe Jesus is saying we need to lop off body parts, but I do think He wants us to see the seriousness of what He is saying

Like a cancerous tumor needs to be removed to save the rest of the body, so sin needs to be dealt with radically so it won't destroy all of who you are

- so deal radically with our sin
 - Now this is so often the opposite of how we do things
 - We are super critical of others, but super gracious with ourselves
- Again, I believe the Lord would say, that is normal, but that isn't greatness
 - Greatness realizes, this issue in my heart needs to go
 - And the emphasis on “your eye”, “your hand”, “your foot” – what Jesus is saying is you need to deal with this

- You can't wait until others do – you need to get on this and get serious about having victory

To not tolerate it, to not excuse it

- But to deal with it, head on
 - To let there be spiritual surgery on my heart no matter what my reputation has to suffer, I am going to get right, I am going to deal with this and excuse it no longer

Lets not kid ourselves any longer – purity is not legalism or works theology, purity is greatness in God's economy

- and without purity, we will never be very effective in our culture, we will never really be great
 - that is why Jesus says in verse 50 – if salt loses its flavor, how will you season it or really what good is it?
- We live in a world with sea salt and table salt, salt in Jesus' day came from the Dead Sea

- **Picture**

And it was essential to be a preserving agent in the world, in the food they would eat, to preserve them in treating the wounds they would get

- But if that salt lost its purity, it would become worthless
 - And you know I love the picture – do you know how salt in that day would lose its flavor, would lose its effectiveness?
- Sometimes the salt would mix in with other the elements of the world and that would corrupt it – in other words if too much of the world got in the salt, it would lose its purity
 - And I love that because, hello, if too much of the world gets in you Christian men and women, you will lose your ability to be a preserving agent in the world around you, you will lose your ability to heal people's wounds, you will lose your ability to make people thirsty for something more than this empty world
- That is why Jesus says, if you want to be great
 - Again if you want to be mediocre, then don't listen
 - But if you want to be great – then you need to receive people, be gracious to people, don't stumble people with your liberties and deal radically with your own sin
 - Plead the blood over it, ask God to cleanse you, by the power of His Holy Spirit and the cleansing power of His Word, let God change you from the inside out
- I'm tired of being mediocre, I want to be great!!!
 - Don't you church??
 - Amen!!!