

To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word of God that we consider this morning is found in the Gospel of Mark 9:30-37.

Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. 31 For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day." 32 But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him. 33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who *would be the greatest*. 35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

So far our text. Dear fellow redeemed.

"Hey mom I'm so happy, I came in last place!" What child comes home shouting out something like that? The thought itself is quite silly. But it shows us something very telling about mankind.

We do not like coming in last. In fact second place is just as repulsive to us as coming in dead last. I know of a professional football player who started in three consecutive Super Bowls and came in second in each one. He said that he would've rather appeared in one Super Bowl and won than appear in three to come in last.

We can see this in the attitude of man since we have fallen into sin. I could easily see Cain having feelings of inferiority because he essentially came in second to Able. The acceptance of the gift was of course a matter of the heart but his pride could've definitely been a motivator behind the murder.

Pride is something that we all suffer from. Some might feel that a diploma hanging on the wall gives them the right to look down upon the so called less mentally endowed. I am prettier than she is. I am stronger and have more stamina than he has. I am older therefore you should listen to me. I do more around here than so and so. I could do it better than he can. What a horrible, self-centered hateful attitude. And so were the hearts of the Apostles in our text. . And so it is with our hearts as well.

Therefore Jesus comes to us through His words in our text as He did in person with the Apostles telling us, **"The least is the greatest."**

Another way that we show our pride or our desire to not come in second is when we don't know something. The Apostles certainly had the problem. Do we as well when we do not ask questions in Bible class because we're afraid of being looked at as stupid?

During Jesus' ministry He was careful to gradually reveal what the plan for the Son of Man was. Remember that the Apostles grew up with the idea that the Messiah was going to be an earthly king. So He taught them slowly and patiently about who and what the Messiah was all about.

Here Jesus takes special occasion to further reveal to the men who would soon take the message of His death and resurrection into the world. We see this by the fact that Jesus didn't want anyone to know where He was. He wanted to be alone with the Apostles so they could focus on the teachings of the Master and not be distracted by all the crowds.

When Jesus finally revealed to them the fact that He was going to be put to death their hard hearts were so proud they didn't even want to ask the One who they looked at as the Coming One what He meant by the statement.

And then when they came to Capernaum they were once again silent. He knew that they argued amongst themselves as to who would be the greatest. What they were essentially arguing was who might have what cabinet position. They were so afraid to make a response about Jesus' statement concerning His death. They didn't want to lose any respect in the eyes of Jesus. The Apostles looked at Jesus' statement much like a vetting process. They looked at Jesus' question as a way for Him to find out who really understood what My kingdom really is and who shall I place in what position?

But to understand the Kingdom of God in this way is to misunderstand the Gospel and the way it relates to all mankind. It is then easy to see how both the Apostles and how we can do severe damage to the Kingdom of God when we in pride do not understand that **"The least is the greatest."**

Jesus continued to be patient and teach the Apostles in this way, **"If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."** This must've been an absolutely confusing statement to the Apostles on the part of Jesus. The Apostles were just arguing amongst themselves about who would be the greatest and Jesus lays this on them. Knowing that the Apostles wouldn't ask Jesus to further explain, He does it for them with the example found in our text.

"Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

A more literal translation of this section is as follows, "And He took an infant, He placed it in the midst of them and taking it into His arms He said to them. Whoever receives an infant such as this in My name receives Me. And whoever receives Me, receives not Me but the One who sent Me."

What a beautiful picture the Lord has given us here. The importance of understanding the fact that Jesus was dealing with an infant instead of a young child is an important one. It's important because it gives us the true understanding of the attitude Jesus is showing the Apostles.

I used to be able to hold Lydia in the air in many different ways. She used to love being held upside down. Sometimes I would hold her upside down away from my body. She would laugh and look around. She could last longer than papa's arms could hold her. I would hold her on my lap to rest and you could see in her eyes that she wanted to be put back in the air upside down.

Now her attitude has changed like any young child. She now knows fear. She doesn't simply submit in trust to her father. Instead she relies upon how close and how tight she can hang onto my shirt. And that is the picture Jesus wanted the Apostles to see and to have us see as well. That very young child who isn't arrogant, but instead is simple and humble. The child who can be taken up into the arms of someone who isn't its father and feel safe and happy. A child who doesn't distinguish and play favorites. A child who in that humility doesn't kick and scream to try to get its way. That is what Jesus meant when He said, "...an infant such as this..."

And hear why this teaching of Jesus is so important, **"...and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."** If we distinguish ourselves greater than those around us the Gospel is destroyed. If the Apostles wouldn't have learned this lesson, they would've never gone out to preach the word of God?

Now understand the heart of God. Jesus Christ who was, is and will always be the King of kings didn't have this attitude in His heart. Reflect on that again. God Himself is humble, obedient and trusting to His own Father. The Only Begotten Son submitted Himself to the wishes of the Father.

'Go and die' the Father said. I am going to make you suffer for all the filthiness of those who rebelled against Us. Although they hate Us, let Us make peace and reconcile their sins through Your life and death.

You're going to take on flesh as they have and you must keep the Law wholly and perfectly. And before the face of all men I am going to reject You and You're going to give up Your life for their sake.

Yes Father. I will do as You say. That is the kind of child Jesus was describing in His picture. He was describing Himself. The Apostles heard what being last is by Jesus' statement concerning His death. And they would soon see Him living out that example. They trusted in that death to relieve them of the guilt they had because they wanted to place themselves above God.

And I pray you do the same as well. Rely upon the humble Servant Jesus Christ to cleanse you from your sins and take away your guilt in regards to this and any other sin.

There is no distinction in the Kingdom of heaven as there is in the affairs of the world. In Christ we are all first. **"The least is the greatest"** such a simple yet complicated thing for our sinfulness to wrestle with. Something we will wrestle with our entire earthly lives. But rely upon the fact that Jesus kept this Law for you and died for it. Take comfort and be strengthened by this so you may become more and more like that child. For Christ's sake. Amen.