

³³ *And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?”* ³⁴ *But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.* Mark 9:33,34 Arriving back in Capernaum they were in Peter’s home when Jesus asked what they had been discussing during the journey back. Jesus taught while they walked, but there would have been plenty of time for the disciples to discuss among themselves Jesus’ teaching.

Consider what Jesus was going through. He had just talked with Moses and Elijah about His departure and told the disciples He would be delivered into the hands of men and killed. He saw the disciples’ inability to rely on prayer when ministering. He knows He is about to leave Capernaum for the last time and head toward His crucifixion, and here they are talking like people of the world fighting over position and power. Jesus knows the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will change all that (Acts 1:8ⁱ), but it still must have been somewhat discouraging. However, Jesus turned it into a teaching opportunity. This is a lesson for us all. Instead of being frustrated and disappointed, we can see these times as an opportunity to teach a better way.

If your child is told for the tenth time that they should not do something and they do it again, sit down with them and ask them if they heard you. Ask them why they disobeyed. Explain that instructions are for their good because you love them. And then explain the discipline you will render if they do it again (Hebrews 12:6ⁱⁱ).

If your spouse yells at you, instead of yelling back, ask them to sit down with you explain why they are upset. Ask what you could have done differently. Ask if there was a better way he or she could have responded to their frustration. Talk about your desire for understanding in love to flow between you.

Jesus could have thrown up his hands and said, “You block heads! When are you ever going to learn?” But instead, He let the Holy Spirit convict them. When He asked what they were talking about, they were silent. That is because they were convicted about the pride they were expressing in wanting to be the greatest.

Have you ever thought about who did end up being the leader after Jesus ascended? Luke and Paul wrote most of the New Testament and they were not of the twelve. Mark was the first Gospel to be written, and he was not one of them either. Only John, Matthew, and Peter wrote portions of the New Testament and as far as volume goes, a smaller portion than those who were not a part of this conversation. The leader of the Jerusalem church was Jesus’ half-brother James, and he was not one of the disciples. One might argue that John’s Gospel has been the most influential book and John was the youngest disciple. I would guess that his name did not come up in the discussion because Jews honored age (Job 12:12ⁱⁱⁱ; 32:9^{iv}).

³⁵ *And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”* Mark 9:35 Here is how Jesus taught. He did not point fingers at the instigator or call out those involved. He taught the principle behind the issue which would help all of them and those who have read this since.

The phrase “he sat down” is not insignificant. In the synagogue the Torah is read standing up, and then the speaker sat down to expound on the passage. Jesus sitting and calling the disciples to Him implies that what He is about to say is extremely important. If you would be first then you must be last of all and servant of all. I imagine there was a

long pause of quiet contemplation. It was so upside down from worldly thinking that they needed time to take it in. They were familiar with disciples serving their rabbi, but serving all, and being last of all, that was shocking.

How can you be first when you are last? It depends on if your perspective is of the world or of God's kingdom. In another place Jesus said the last shall be first and the first shall be last (Matthew 20:16^v). This was not the first time they had heard this teaching. Even though Jesus follows it with an illustration, they will still struggle with the living this out. He will repeat this in the next chapter (10:43,44^{vi}). At the Last Supper Jesus taught them again by washing their feet, but even then ²⁴ *A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.* ²⁵ *And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors.* ²⁶ *But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.* ²⁷ *For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.* Luke 22:24-27

Why did this need to be taught at least three times to the disciples? Why is it repeated in the Gospels? **The battle between flesh and spirit is one of selfishness versus unconditional love** (Galatians 5:17^{vii}). **It is one of the main indicators of the condition of our souls.** It shows us if we have been crucified with Christ or if we are living for ourselves (Galatians 5:24^{viii}). Have we died to our old nature. Are we crucifying it every time it demands its selfish ways or wallows in self-pity for not getting its way? In serving others do we count it as an honor serving our Lord (Ephesians 6:7^{ix})?

Here is how the Apostle Paul taught this truth. ³ *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* Philippians 2:3 We cannot do that without yielding ourselves to the life of Christ within us (2 Corinthians 4:10^x). Those who know how merciful, loving, and gracious God has been to them want to serve Him out of gratitude and love. And how do we serve Him? Jesus said, *"In as much as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto Me."* Matthew 25:40 We see an opportunity to serve Christ when we see a brother in need.

John goes so far as to say that when we see a brother in need and do not have compassion, how can we say the love of Christ lives in us (1 John 3:17^{xi}). Ouch! That does not mean we give to every person with their hand out, but it does mean we are to be obedient to the Holy Spirit and give whatever and whenever He prompts us to give. It does mean that when we can meet a need within the family of God we probably should. We do not want to enable those who refuse to work (2 Thessalonians 3:10^{xii}). Paul said to stop helping them. They need to work and contribute. But when a person is doing the best they can and they face a hardship, we should be there to encourage them and help with any physical need we can meet.

When you meet those legitimate needs as serving the Lord, you lay up your treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:20^{xiii}). We thank God that we can serve, but we also thank Him for the promise of repayment, which is translated as reward in the New Testament (Matthew 10:42^{xiv}). There are all kinds of investment advertisements because those companies make money on your money. But the very best interest rate is to lay up your treasures in heaven. The return is out of this world! This is a mindset that comes from the new life in you. Paul tells us ¹ *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* ² *Set your minds on*

things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* ⁴ *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* Colossians 3:1-4 What a promise!

³⁶ *And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them,* ³⁷ *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”* Mark 9:36,37 Jesus illustrated His teaching by taking a little child and putting him in among the disciples gathered before Jesus. This tells me there must have been children around listening. This was not normal in that culture. Children were valued but were not to interfere in any way especially when the Scriptures were being taught. Jesus seemed to like to have them around.

Then Jesus picked the child up, holding him in His arms. I like this scene. Can you see Jesus looking lovingly into the face of this child He is holding? Surely the child felt greater love than he ever had before.

Why is receiving a child in Jesus' name the same as receiving Him? Looking at Jesus' other expressions about children will help us understand what He means. ¹ *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”* ² *And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them* ³ *and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* ⁴ *Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* Matthew 18:1-4 In this passage Jesus is again contrasting the desire for greatness in the world's eyes with kingdom of heaven greatness. He relates it to the humility a child has knowing he or she has a lot to learn and is dependent on parents to care for them.

Another saying of Jesus is in Matthew 19:14 ¹⁴ *but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”* Again, we see that those in the kingdom of God are humble, inquisitive, and dependent on God. They know they have so much to learn and need the care and guidance of their heavenly Father. The world thinks of greatness as others a person whom others look up to and serve. That is the problem with many politicians. Jesus modeled greatness in living a life of service and total dependence on His Father (John 5:19^{xv}). The disciples were having a hard time seeing the difference, so Jesus illustrated it with the child He was holding. I think the fact that Jesus was holding him or her also illustrated the child's trust. That may be why Jesus said that it was better to have a millstone hung around one's neck and thrown into the sea than to harm a child (9:42^{xvi}). It betrays that trust and causes the child to then have a difficult time trusting God.

Therefore, **we should desire godly greatness which means humility, trust in God, and dependency on Him while we serve those around us.** We should honor those who live in such a manner rather than the boastful know-it-alls who expect everyone to serve them because they think they are so great. ⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,* 1 Peter 5:6 The exaltation from God does not necessarily result in honor in the eyes of the world, but rather honor from the people of faith who acknowledge service to others. There is also the exaltation when they go to their heavenly reward. Those who will shine brightest in heaven will be the ones who were humble servants of the Lord while on earth (1 Corinthians 15:40,41^{xvii}). That does not come from effort for reward, but from a heart that humbly recognizes their need for the life of Christ in them to guide them in all their ways.

To receive children in Jesus' name is to share with them God's love and kindness, grace and mercy. Hughes explains, *in the Aramaic language, which Jesus spoke, child and servant were the same word. Thus, Jesus was saying that the disciples must receive his children (other servants and disciples) with the open arms and love with which he was holding that child. There was to be no thought of precedence (who was better than whom), but simple, open-armed affection.*^{xviii} As we are all made in the image of God, receiving fellow believers with God's love helps to direct them to seek that love from above. The more one walks with God, the more they will love the family of God and patiently serve them. That was contrary to Jesus' culture and ours as well. Jesus is opening our eyes to a heavenly perspective that He constantly illustrated with His daily life while walking among us.

That humility that is spiritual greatness was even exhibited by Jesus in the promise He attached to the teaching. Receiving fellow believers in Jesus' name is to receive Jesus, for they are the body of Christ (Matthew 25:40^{xix}). Then Jesus added it is ultimately not Him but God who sent Him whom we receive. The entire Trinity expresses this humility, for the Holy Spirit points to Jesus and Jesus points to the Father. He came to reconcile us to God. God shows the same humility in that He allows the focus of humanity to be on the Son.

³⁸ *John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."* Mark 9:38 I call this territorial Christianity. It is prevalent in American churches. A pastor from Southern California shared with me how competitive the churches were in the area where he ministered. If one church was going to advertise a big Sunday event, other churches would plan their events on the same Sunday. Of course, every pastor thinks they have the best teaching and most biblical training, or they would want people to go to the church that did, if they are really desiring to advance the kingdom of God. That is what John was expressing in this verse. They had Jesus, so why could anyone do something in His name and not be with them? If there was anyone in the world who could have said, "Yes, we have the whole truth so that person should be with us," it is Jesus. He alone could say that, but He did not.

If that man was casting out demons in the name of Jesus, it means He had Jesus' authority. That is what it means to do something in His name. If He did not have the authority, the demons would have done what the demon did to the seven sons of Sceva. In the book of Acts, we read the account of sons of a high priest who tried to use Jesus' name like a magic word. They saw the Apostle Paul cast out demons in Jesus' name so they thought they could use it like a tool. They did not have Jesus' authority. They did not belong to Christ. The demon said, "I know Jesus and Paul, but who are you?" It knew they did not have Jesus' authority, so it attacked them with supernatural strength ripping off their clothes, wounded them, and sent them running off humiliated (Acts 19:13-16^{xx}).

We can conclude that the man the disciples saw casting out demons belonged to Jesus and had His authority to do so. This is what ties these two accounts together. Jesus was encouraging them to love and serve others who were serving Him and exalting His name. Too often we reject others because they are not from our church, denomination, or have some difference in minor doctrines. What matters is that Jesus is exalted as Savior.

³⁹ *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."* Acts 9:39 Jesus gave them a logical

answer. At his time in the ministry of Jesus, people, including those in power, were starting to choose sides for and against Jesus. Jesus answer to the disciples was common sense. If the man is doing good things using the name of Jesus, he cannot turn around and slander Him. He has chosen the right side. We do not know anything about how the man was converted, but He had come under Jesus' influence and chosen to work on the same team. Would it have been better for him to follow Jesus through those days that followed, perhaps, but Jesus accepts us where we are at if our heart is to do His will. Surely that man became part of the early church in the months that followed.

⁴⁰ *For the one who is not against us is for us.* Acts 9:40 Competition among churches grieves the Lord's heart (Galatians 5:19,20^{xxi}). Christians rejecting other Christians is prideful. People often desire churches to work together. That is a beautiful thing and God desires unity (John 17:22^{xxii}). At the same time each church has its own unique calling and reaches a certain type of person. Our individual callings reach more people than if we became one big organization all following the same pattern. We sponsor more missions, send out more missionaries, preach in different styles that reach different people, and have unique ministries. The variety is part of the whole church in the area. The early church that came out of Jerusalem was no different. Each city had multiple home churches each led by one of the city's elders. The big difference is that the elders would meet together to support and encourage one another. They considered each house church as a part of the church of that city. In the same way, we should consider our church as just one part of the Bible believing churches in our town, all of whom are on the same team.

What displeases the Lord is when one church slanders another or tries to recruit people from another church. We have a number of Bible believing churches in our area. Some people leave to go to another one and some from other churches come here. As long as they are under godly shepherds who proclaim the Word and exalt Jesus and are not leaving because of unresolved conflict, there is nothing wrong with that. The one who is not against us is for us, or we could say is also working for the kingdom of God.

⁴¹ *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.* Mark 9:41 We are to bless our fellow believers and in doing so we will be rewarded. We should never try to draw people from another church that proclaims the Word. If they need to be at another church to grow, then God will direct them. Bless your fellow believers and you will be blessed. We are not competing for who can have the biggest attendance. **You will be rewarded in eternity for humbly serving one another in love.** That is Jesus' promise in this verse. That is what He was teaching with the little child He held in His arms.

Our text today began with Jesus' correcting the disciples' view of greatness. The heavenly perspective of greatness is humble dependence on God and loving service towards our fellow believers. That was followed by the lesson that the one who is not against us is for us, and the encouraging promise of reward for blessing our fellow believers. Let us take each of these truths to heart.

Questions:

1 What preceded this passage? 2 How inappropriate was the disciples' discussion? 3 How did Jesus correct them? 4 What was His illustration and how did it apply? 5 How does the Aramaic affect the interpretation? 6 How are we to live the Christlike life?

7 How different is it from the way of the world? 8 What issue did John bring up?
9 What does Jesus' answer imply? 10 What are the three take away points to live out?

ⁱ **Acts 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

ⁱⁱ **Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)**

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

ⁱⁱⁱ **Job 12:12 (ESV)**

¹² Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.

^{iv} **Job 32:9 (ESV)**

⁹ It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right.

^v **Matthew 20:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last."

^{vi} **Mark 10:43-44 (ESV)**

⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,
⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

^{vii} **Galatians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

^{viii} **Galatians 5:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

^{ix} **Ephesians 6:7 (ESV)**

⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,

^x **2 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

^{xi} **1 John 3:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

^{xii} **2 Thessalonians 3:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

^{xiii} **Matthew 6:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

^{xiv} **Matthew 10:42 (ESV)**

⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

^{xv} **John 5:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

^{xvi} **Mark 9:42 (ESV)**

⁴² "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.

^{xvii} **1 Corinthians 15:40-41 (ESV)**

⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

^{xviii} R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 32.

^{xix} **Matthew 25:40 (ESV)**

⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

^{xx} **Acts 19:13-16 (ESV)**

¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who

had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” ¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

^{xxi} **Galatians 5:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

^{xxii} **John 17:22 (ESV)**

²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,