

## TRUE GREATNESS

Mark 9:33-10:16

Key Verse: 9:35

"Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.'"

In the last passage (9:14-32), Jesus said, "Everything is possible for him who believes." We also learned that unbelief is the root of all sins. We believe that Jesus helps us overcome unbelief in our hearts. Today's passage has many parts. But all the beatific sayings of this passage direct our thoughts to Jesus, who is truly great in the sight of God. All of us want to be truly great, don't we? We don't want to be petty, do we? Let's open our hearts to hear what Jesus has to say.

I. A truly great man is one who serves (9:33-37)

**First**, each person has a desire to be the greatest (33-34). While he was going up to Jerusalem, where crucifixion awaited him, Jesus came to Capernaum (33a). At that time, Jesus was bracing himself with the thought of his upcoming death on the cross. Even though he repeatedly taught his disciples about his death and resurrection (8:31,32; 9:30-32), they had hardly accepted his teaching concerning his death and resurrection. Instead, following Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, they were arguing about who was

the greatest among themselves. The question, "who is the greatest," troubled their hearts most.

So Jesus asked them in verse 33b, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because they felt somewhat embarrassed, because "who would be the greatest" was the subject of their argument. Nobody wanted to be the second man--not even Bartholomew. Why do men struggle so hard to be the greatest? It is because Almighty God made man in his own image (Ge 1:27). God put a supreme desire in man to grow to the fullest extent until each one would be like a child of God. Because of this, man has an endless desire to be the greatest (Ge 1:28). In the 19th century, most American teenagers yearned to be the greatest, like President Abraham Lincoln or novelist Mark Twain. At that time, American young people were very noble and had a stewardship of the whole world. They lived sacrificially for a greater purpose. They were concerned with all the needy people of the world. Their vision was worldwide in scale. As a result, God made this nation a most influential nation in the world.

Jesus did not rebuke his disciples because of their argument behind his back. Rather, he deeply understood their conflict. So Jesus told them several basic principles to enable them to become truly great men.

**Second**, a truly great man is a humble man. Look at verse 35. "Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.'" Fallen men all have the idea that each is the number one man. In other words, fallen men are all extremely proud. Therefore, if anyone wants to be the number one man, he must know how to

humble himself before God. A truly great man is a humble person who respects all others more than himself. Moses is known as one of the greatest men in history because of his humbleness. Numbers 12:3 says, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth."

Paul was a very proud man. Before conversion he was an ambitious man. He studied and worked hard to satisfy his human ambition. He became an indispensable person in the Jewish community. In the course of time, Paul had authority to consent to the execution of Stephen. In this way, Paul became a murderer in the sight of God. After conversion, when Paul thought about his past sins, Paul felt he did not deserve to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God (1Co 15:9). But when he thought about the forgiveness of Jesus who commissioned him as a light for the Gentiles, he could only say, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1Co 15:10). Paul became a truly humble person before God until he changed his name from Saul, "the greatest," to Paul, "small one."

Jesus is the greatest because he was the most humble person in human history. He is God himself. But he gave up the glory, power and honor of the glorious kingdom of God and became like one of us. We call this the "Incarnation of Jesus." The holy God lowered himself in order to become a friend of tax collectors. The Pharisees criticized Jesus because Jesus associated freely with tax collectors and public sinners. But Jesus did not mind, because he knew why he was a friend to them. Matthew 11:28 says,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Whenever we think of Jesus' humbleness, we are abundantly comforted. If anybody wants to be great, he must learn how to humble himself, for James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

**Third**, a truly great man is one who serves others. Generally, people want to be loved and served by others. Biblically speaking, they are fallen men with a beggar's mentality. Finally, such a person becomes useless in society. What is worse, such a person is worthless to God. On the other hand, one who knows how to serve others in the name of Jesus is happy because God gives him joy in his soul. He who serves becomes an indispensable person wherever he goes. When we meditate on Jesus' words deeply, we learn that the measure of our greatness depends on how many people we serve.

There are many who want to serve but don't know how. So Jesus demonstrated to his disciples how to serve others. Look at verses 36,37. "He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.'" A newborn baby is helpless without the help of his parents. When Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me," he meant that one who helps the helpless is truly a great man. Helping the helpless is not an easy task, because helpless people have many bad habits, and they demand help from others endlessly. Helping the helpless seems to be in vain. But without helping the helpless, we cannot experience

the love of Jesus. Jesus our Lord wants us to be truly great by helping the helpless.

## II. A truly great man must be broad-minded (9:38-41)

In this part, Jesus tells us that narrow-minded people cannot be great. Look at verse 38. "Teacher,' said John, 'we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.'"

Look at verse 39. "'Do not stop him,' Jesus said. 'No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me...'" Jesus rejected the group spirit that condemns others or another group. This exclusiveness is a common malady among Christian churches. We must remember how Jesus our Lord tolerated all kinds of people in order to save them from their sins. We must struggle hard to overcome our narrow-mindedness. We must struggle hard to have a broad mind as generous as that of Jesus. How can we be generous? Verse 41 says, "I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward." This verse gives a simple and direct answer to the perfidiousness of exclusivism. It also strongly encourages us to have a broad mind until we can give a cup of cold water to a servant of God who is not in our group.

## III. A truly great man builds up new Christians (9:42-50)

**First**, a truly great man does not cause new Christians to stumble (42). Look

at verse 42. "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck." It is serious to cause young Christians to stumble and sin and fall away from their faith in Jesus. Why is it so serious? It is because one who makes others stumble takes away their eternal life and inheritance in the kingdom of God and sends them to hell. Causing new Christians to stumble seems to be a light matter. But it is sinning against God. There is too much peer pressure, and there are too many elements in this country that cause young Christians to stumble. There are not many Bible-believing Christians. But they must build up young Christians' faith. We must defeat the enemies of God who cause young Christians to stumble.

**Second**, a truly great man must know the seriousness of sinning (43-48). Look at verses 43-48. "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'" These verses speak of the seriousness of sinning as Christians. If a Christian has something that causes him to sin, he must cut it off, no matter what the surgery or how much the cost involved. Otherwise, he will go to the place where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (48). It sounds as if we must cut off all the parts of our bodies because of our sins; still, we will be thrown into hell. But we

should not underestimate Jesus' words concerning the result of committing sins. A truly great man must fight the spiritual battle with himself, as well as serve others.

**Third**, a truly great man is a salty Christian (50). We Christians must be a good influence in society. Look at verse 50. "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other." We know that salt has various uses. But it has two outstanding characteristics. Salt gives good taste to food. We know how unpleasant a dish is when the salt is accidentally omitted in its preparation. Salt is also a preservative. In secular society, purity is gone and spiritual realities are unknown. The Christian's task is to bring a purifying influence into that corruption. We Christians must encourage one another to be salty.

#### IV. A truly great man does not make use of the law (10:1-12)

Jesus left Galilee and came to Judea. While Jesus was teaching the word of God to the crowd of people as he was approaching Jerusalem, certain Pharisees came to test him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (1,2) "What did Moses command you?" Jesus replied. They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away" (4). Look at verse 5. "'It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,' Jesus replied." Here the words, "your hearts were hard," mean that the Pharisees had already determined to divorce by making use of the divorce law. The Pharisees' question was ill-gotten and had vicious intent. In

ancient times, people were lawless. They divorced women at random. So Moses gave them a law of divorce, in order to prevent lawless divorce. In this way, Jesus explained why Moses permitted divorce. Still, the Pharisees remained stone faced. But Jesus had great compassion on them. In order to open their spiritual eyes, Jesus began to teach them Genesis. Look at verses 6-9. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' (Ge 2:24). So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." Jesus plainly told them that the motive of divorce is to commit adultery (10-12). An adulterous person is not a great man. If anybody wants to be a truly great man, he should overcome adulterous desires toward women.

#### V. A truly great man is like the little children (10:13-16)

People brought little children to Jesus for his blessing, but the disciples rebuked them (13). What did Jesus do with his boorish disciples? Look at verse 14. "When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" By blessing the children, Jesus explains further why the kingdom of God belongs to such children. There are many characteristics common to children. But two characteristics are notable. First, a child trusts his parents simply. Many a child thinks that his father is number one, and that his father can do everything. All children trust their parents. Second, a child is obedient. Many a child is happy to run errands. Many a child

has a strong desire to please his parents. Children are like the servants of the wedding at Cana in Galilee, who obeyed Jesus' word and filled the jars to the brim out of their willingness.

Most people in the world have the head of a leviathan and the mouth of a crocodile and the chest of a sparrow and the legs of a flea. They talk big. They are out of proportion. They neither trust nor obey. In this time of sophistication, tumultuous complexity and diversity of culture, men can hardly have absolute faith in the word of God. In the midst of pandemic relativism, many a man is going crazy in a conflict between body and spirit in his soul. No man can simply accept the truth of God like a child. But without simple trust and obedience like children, no one can enter the kingdom of God.

This passage tells us how we can be truly great men in the sight of God. May God be gracious to you, to help you become a truly great man.