

Mark 9:30-37

A talk by Rev David Eastwood on 14 November 2021

What does it take to be great?

Our world, our culture, says a lot about this – look after number one. Get to the top. Achieve. Be noticed, recognised. Be heard. Be successful.

Today, we're going to see what Jesus says about greatness.

We're continuing our journey through Mark's Gospel.

Jesus is with his disciples. He's teaching them. He's no longer with the crowds.

We've already seen that he wants them to understand who he is, and so:

He takes them to Caesarea Philippi, when they see he is the Christ, the Messiah.

He takes just three of them up a mountain, when they see he is the Son of God, the Holy One, and that they should listen to him.

He feeds 5,000 and 4,000 people, so they can learn to trust in his provision.

And last week as he drove out an evil spirit from a young boy, he teaches them to know their limits, and that God has no limits - that apart from me, you can do nothing, but through prayer, all things are possible for God.

And Jesus wants us, his disciples, to know these things as well.

And now he teaches them about greatness.

He's on his way to Jerusalem. He's explaining to his disciples what will happen to him there.

He will be delivered into the hands of men, who will kill him, but three days later he will rise to life. Betrayed/ delivered up - Delivered up by Judas. By the Scribes, Jewish Leaders. By Pilate. By the Romans. But also, delivered up by God (Acts 2:23) - Peter's first sermon after Pentecost.

God the Father handed Jesus over, he was abandoned by God.

'My God, my God why have you forsaken me', Jesus cried out, as he bore/carried the sins of the world. From the beginning of time, the Father agreed to send His Son, Jesus, to save us.

And Jesus always does the will of the Father. But the disciples don't understand!

Jesus is talking about him being betrayed, humiliated, flogged and crucified, but three days later he will rise – And all they can do is to argue about greatness. Who was the greatest?

Peter, James and John were the only ones with Jesus on the mountain when Jesus met with Elijah and Moses. Weren't they the greatest? May be all the 12 felt great, better than others, as they were the ones chosen by Jesus? Competitive/ status.

I'm closer to God than you, we may think privately. I read my bible and pray more than you, we think. I do more in this church than others. I've led more people to Jesus than many people. God's quite pleased with me, more so than some others.

And what does Jesus say? To be great, you need to be last. To be great, you need to be the servant of everyone.

'If anyone wants to be first, they must be the very last, and the servant of all.' (v 35)

And then, as a visual aid, he takes a little child -

Who has no power, no greatness, someone who's weak, dependent, ignored, with nothing to offer. And Jesus says:

Welcome that child, be like that child, humble yourself like a child. Don't look down on others. And as we welcome a little child, we welcome God himself. Why are we competitive? Why are we into status and recognition? Why do we so often need the affirmation of others? –

Because we've misunderstood what Jesus says about greatness.

We've completely misunderstood grace (our first song – 'Your grace is enough')

Grace says this – none of us have been able to do anything that is worthy of respect.

None of us have been able to do anything to save ourselves, or to change God's opinion about us.

Grace is not what we can do, but what God has done in sending Jesus.

Grace is a free gift from God that we can receive.

'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'. (James 4:6).

We are all lost. We are all broken, weak and lost sinners.

And so why are we in competition with one another?

Why do we look down on others? Why do we think we are better than others?

Because we haven't understood grace.

What we need is the gift of grace that will give us life.

What we need is the gift of grace, that will give us forgiveness.

What we need is the gift of grace, that will lift us from broken-ness and bring us healing.

What we need is the gift of grace, so we can be of use to God's kingdom and God's purposes. How quickly we can think that what's going on around us is somehow due to our greatness, our skills, talents, our own hard work, effort and perseverance.

As St Paul says this - 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition, but in humility consider others to be better than yourselves'. (Phil 2:3).

Jesus is our model. He humbled himself, and became obedient to death.

He didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'. (Mark 10:45)

How we need his grace.

Song 'Abide with me'

What is true greatness? - Knowing that God has done it all.

So Jesus, abide with me. Don't let me fall. Don't let go. Walk with Jesus. Never leave.

Ever close, God abide with me.

Jesus says - You want to be first? – then be the very last, and be the servant of all.

So walk through today recognising that every breath, every sight, every scene, every person you meet, is a gift of grace.

And today, if you haven't experienced this grace, this gift from God, if you want to know more about true greatness that Jesus speaks about, don't leave today without speaking to someone – come to me, speak to someone.

God so wants to use each of us, not only as a recipient of grace, but as a channel of his grace.

How can you be a channel of God's grace this week?

AMEN