

The Surprising King Mark 9:30-37

(Show slide 1 as soon as Bible Reading ends)

How would you respond if someone called you an **animal**?

How about if they called you a **particular animal**? It would depend on what it was.

- **Change to slide 2** You are a lion
- **Change to slide 3** You are an eagle
- **Change to slide 4** You are a sloth
- **Change to slide 5** You are a goat

Change to slide 6 What if someone said, you are **THE GOAT**? The greatest of all time.

There is part of us that would love to be the **GOAT** in the particular field that we care about. That could be in sport or music or education or career. It's different for each one of us. But what is the same is the inner desire to **personally succeed** and have the **wider recognition** and the **applause** of others.

This may be a **normal way** to live but is it right? We may dream of being the greatest but how wise is it to pursue **the top status** with our time, talents and treasures?

In this section of **Mark's Gospel** we are presented with the topic of greatness. My plan is to answer **two questions**:

- Who is the greatest? (Vs 30-32)
- What greatest should we pursue? (Vs 33-37)

First, who is the greatest? (Vs 30-32)

Look at verse 30. **Read verses 30 to 32.**

The first **surprising observation** from these verses I want to highlight is the deliberate low profile that Jesus was keeping.

He is a celebrity by now but why isn't he acting like Taylor Swift on one of her international tours?

He was teaching his disciples.

He was **teaching**. It is teaching that we need above all if we are to grow as disciples and make it as disciples.

He was teaching **his disciples**. This was a movement that Jesus wanted to continue. He invested in the original generation so that they would accurately pass on the faith to the millions of people who would join the church in the centuries afterwards.

It means that we can have confidence that we can know what to believe and that we are connected with a global and historic church.

What was he teaching? This is the **second surprising observation**.

Listen again to verse 31. **Read verse 31.**

Here is a description of the mission of the greatest person of all time.

It is the Son of Man from **Daniel chapter 7**.

Daniel 7:13-14, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

But in **Mark 9**, this Son of Man is presented in a very different way. We're told that he will die. Or more precisely, he will be **delivered** into the hands of men and they will kill him.

We mustn't miss the reference to his glorious resurrection. We're told that after three days he will rise. However, before a resurrection comes a death.

What's going on? The greatest one of all becomes the least one of all in order to rescue us to be part of the greatest kingdom..

Jesus is definitely glorious because of his **eternal identity**. However, here in **Mark chapter 9**, the focus is on his **earthly mission**.

We're used to calling Jesus the **Lamb**. However, today I want you to think of him as the **GOAT**. He truly is the greatest of all time.

Let's enjoy **learning** about him. **Singing** about him and **speaking** about him, both to Christians and non-Christians.

That would be normal behaviour if the **great hero of your passion comes to town**.

We will praise Jesus for all eternity. Let's not be embarrassed to do it now!

Before we move on and think about what greatness we should pursue I have **one more surprising observation** to highlight from this section.

Look at verse 32. **Read verse 32.**

This is very **honest** and **comforting**. You are not the first disciple who has ever felt too afraid to ask for clarification.

Why were **those ones** afraid to ask? It might just have been the general embarrassment of looking silly. However, I wonder if it's tied into this theme of greatness. That's what they are talking about as they walk along the road. In their eyes, if you want to occupy the top spot in Jesus' organisation, you need to know your theology pretty well. So the pressure to pretend would have been enormous.

Friends, let me encourage you. Our status in the kingdom of heaven is not dependent on your test scores in a theological exam. The reality is that lots of the time there will be lots we won't know. So let's pray for a culture where we can openly say, "I don't know. Can you help me out?" Or if someone asks you something, "I don;t know, but I'll find out." This includes your pastors as well.

This is really important because the more clear we are about discipleship, the more committed we will want to be and the more effective we will be as we live out our faith in the one who is the greatest of all time!

Second, what greatness should we pursue? (Vs 33-37)

Change to slide 7 Look at verse 33. **Read verses 33 to 35.**

That would have been an **awkward conversation** in the house.

What were you talking about on the journey? Silence. Oh come on, it must have been interesting? Nothing.

Jesus knows exactly what they have been discussing and so to help them channel their inner passions he gives them a **short theological sentence** that is packed full of **theological weight**.

Verse 35, "...Anyone who wants to become first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

How should the disciples of Jesus respond to the internal desire for greatness?

Notice we are not to suppress it. Jesus doesn't say stop it. Get rid of your energy for greatness and become a passive and lazy person who settles for mediocrity .

No, Jesus says make sure you have an overwhelming passion for greatness and go for it with all your heart.

But as you do, make sure you understand what true greatness really is.

It isn't about how many people recognise you in the street or how many times you get an award or a medal or how often you get interviewed on national radio.

No, true greatness is about becoming the greatest servant we can.

This shouldn't be a surprise. If Jesus is the greatest of all time, and he just then he sets the definition of greatness. And what characterises the life of Jesus? Sacrifice and service of others.

If you want to be great then be like Jesus. Be a servant of **all**, regardless of what status they have in the world's eyes.

To make his point, Jesus gives a very practical example.

Look at verse 36. **Read verses 36 and 37.**

Jesus doesn't choose a child because they are great examples of being humble and servant-like. No, they are examples of who Jesus means when he says, be servants of **all**.

In that society they were not the centre of the universe. They were often seen as a nuisance and certainly weren't regarded as having high status.

And yet Jesus picks one up and holds them close.

As he does this, he is saying by his actions, "You see this little one. They're a nobody in the world. But to me they are precious and valuable."

And so Jesus says to his disciples, "**Go and do the same.**"

The world says, hook yourself to the important and successful if you want to make it in life. Avoid the low and the least. Aim for those on are higher up the pecking order. And Jesus says, nonsense. Be a servant of all, no matter how unimportant and weak they are to the world we inhabit.

Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and who welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Notice the phrase, **in my name**. It's not just welcoming the least for any reason but in the name of Jesus. That is, we are doing it because we are Christians. When we do this, it's a sign that we have welcomed Jesus into our hearts. It will also be for our continued maturity and growth as Jesus continues to transform us.

This way of living is **revolutionary**.

How can we do it? Here's my suggestion.

Walk into every space and place and ask yourself one question: **How can I be a servant here?**

Not, 'Who do I know?' or 'Whose presence can I benefit from?' or 'What can I get out of this?', but 'How can I serve? and Who can I serve?'

If you live like that you will **start noticing things**.

In church. The person sitting on their own or standing on their own after the service. Or the team struggling to pack away the chairs. Or the person rejected in the eyes of the world but welcome in the kingdom of Jesus.

In your house. That pile at the bottom of the stairs.

Out and about. The person struggling to get on the train with a buggy. Or the person at work that seems unusually quiet and sad but when you have so many important things to attend to. How can I be a servant?

The danger is that we simply go through our life dedicated to our own priorities. **Maybe we see Jesus as simply a booster rocket for getting what we want more quickly.**

In **Mark chapter 9**, Jesus turns that thinking on its head. Yes, pursue greatness but recognise it means to be a servant of all.

We can only do it when we focus our thoughts on the GOAT.

Jesus is the greatest person of all time.

He saved us on the cross and he now empowers us to follow in his sacrificial footsteps.

The way of the cross is **costly** and **challenging** . However, it is also beautifully energising and joyful.

So let us pray for the help from heaven to live out the ways of heaven right here on the earth.

Let's pray.